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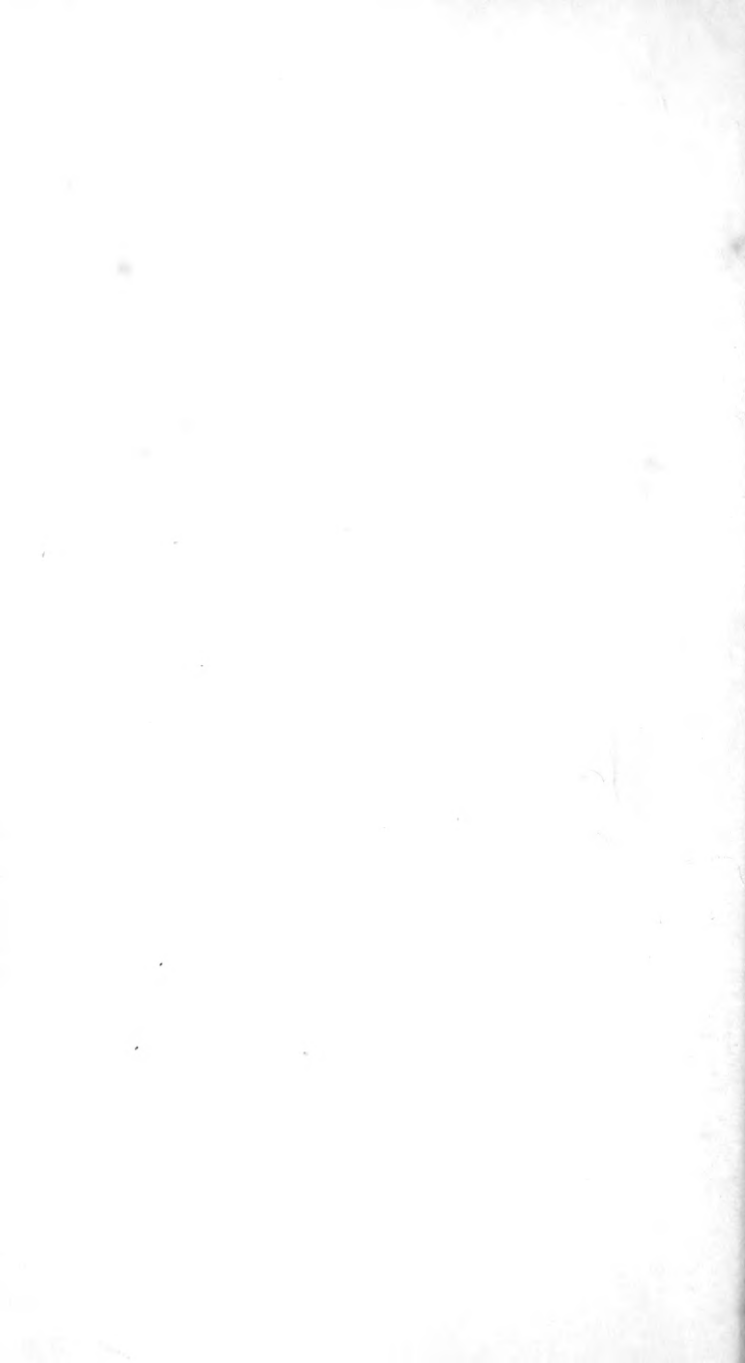






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## CHAPTER I.

IT had rained all day. Towards five o'clock the sun was making a desperate effort to shine for a moment before his final disappearance behind the grassy hill which rises in front of Grantley Manor. A heavy mass of clouds, just tinged at the edges by a line of purple light, was slowly rolling along the sky, overhanging the Abbey Woods, Heron Castle, and the ridge of muirland which extends far up the valley of the Grant. The red maples and the yellow beeches in the park wore their gaudiest autumnal hues, though many of their bright-coloured leaves were strewed

on the grass beneath, or floated down the rapid stream, as it made its way through the valley to a tide river, some twenty miles further to the south. A fine November day has an indescribable mildness peculiar to itself, a calm and mournful beauty which pervades the soul, and soothes it into a deep tranquillity. On the day and at the hour of which I am speaking, two persons were standing together by the stone balustrade which separates the flower-garden of the manor-house from the park beneath it. One of these was an elderly woman, whose set features and vacant gaze might have indicated either a total absence of thought, or an absorbing preoccupation. She seemed to be either pensive or sleepy. By her side was a girl half-sitting, half-leaning, on the parapet; her slight and graceful figure was wrapped in a fur pelisse, which hung about her in heavy folds, her arms were crossed on her breast, her eyes sometimes fixed on the ground, sometimes raised

towards the road across the park, and then hastily withdrawn. Now and then she snatched a China rose from the bush beneath her, and scattered its leaves about with reckless profusion.

Margaret Leslie was a beautiful girl. Her eyes were of that peculiar colour which varies from iron-grey to the deepest violet; her nose was small and aquiline, and her mouth admirably formed, but slightly curved downwards at the corners, so that when she did not smile there was something perhaps not quite agreeable in its expression, but the smile was so enchanting and so frequent that there was hardly time to miss it before it beamed again in all its brightness. Her eyelashes were black and long, and her hair fell, not in stiff ringlets, but in rich brown flakes round her white and slender neck. As she watched the flying rose-leaves, and vainly attempted to guide their descent into the basin of a small fountain under the terrace, her narrow delicately pencilled

and arched eye-brows contracted into a frown which might have kept in order anything less unmanageable than flying rose-leaves. Indeed to expect that they would not blow about in the breeze which was just getting up as the sun sank behind the hill, was sanguine; but Margaret's expectations were rather apt to be unreasonable. For instance, she was at that moment almost provoked that Mrs. Dalton, her governess, did not perceive by a kind of intuition that she was tired of watching for the travelling carriage which according to her calculations ought to have brought her father to the gates of the avenue an hour before, and which had not yet made its appearance.

"Really, dear Mrs. Dalton," she said at last, "I cannot stay here any longer. As my father is not yet arrived, I am sure he will not come in time for dinner."

"My dear, it is only six o'clock."

"How short the days are getting, then! What



a blazing fire they have made in the hall!" Margaret exclaimed, as she threw open the entrance door.

"Is Mr. Sydney arrived?" she inquired as she crossed the billiard-room, and rolled the balls about in an impatient manner.

As they tumbled headlong into the pockets, she said, half aloud and half to herself,

"I shall never love my father as much as Walter Sydney!"

"Oh, but my dear you ought," suggested Mrs. Dalton.

Margaret turned suddenly round, and while she untied the strings of her black lace bonnet, and pushed back from her cold cheeks the curls that hung heavily about them, she replied,—

"When will you learn, dear Mrs. Dalton, that *you ought* is no argument at all?"

"When will *you* learn, Margaret, that *you ought* should be the most powerful argument in the world?"

It was not Mrs. Dalton who had ventured on this reply. It was made by one who always spoke the truth to Margaret, and from whom she was always willing to hear it, for she loved and respected Walter Sydney, and had often been heard to assert that he was the only person she knew who made the truth agreeable, and on this particular occasion she was so glad to see him, that even had the remark displeased her, she would still have held out her hand to him as she passed through the room. After closing the door, she opened it again, and said to him with a smile,—

“If you knew the subject of our dispute, you would not, perhaps, have taken Mrs. Dalton’s part. But you always think it right to assume that I am in the wrong.”

He shook his head, but she was gone ; and he heard her on the stairs and in the passages, carolling away like a bird on the wing.

This Walter Sydney was a man of about thirty-five or thirty-six. He was tall and thin; his complexion sallow; some might have thought that there was beauty in his pale high forehead, in the lines of his face, and in the expression of his eyes; but the awkwardness of his figure, and a want of ease in his manner, generally destroyed that impression, and the usual remark of those who saw him for the first time, was, "What a strange-looking man Mr. Sydney is!" To Margaret Leslie he had always appeared the personification of goodness and of wisdom, and she looked up to him with the strongest affection. He had been very intimate with her father from an early age. Heron Castle, the grey turretted house which stood in the midst of what were called the Abbey Woods, on the hill opposite to Grantley, was his father's place, and he and Henry Leslie had been friends and companions from the days of their boyhood. Leslie was the older of the two,

and when Walter, a shy and awkward youth who had been entirely educated at home, and who, with a passionate love of study, had an insuperable dislike to new scenes and new associates, joined him at Oxford, he welcomed him with a warmth and a joy which excited the surprise of his own gay and dissipated friends.

Before his first departure for Oxford Henry Leslie had determined in his own mind to marry his cousin, Mary Thornton, a gentle quiet girl, whose father was the clergyman of the village, and who had been his and Walter Sydney's constant companion ever since they could remember. He had called her in play his little wife, and she had taken it so much for granted that they were to be married as soon as they were old enough (for he had told her so whenever they had parted with fresh tears or met with fresh joy at each successive holidays), that when he, one day, seriously asked her if she would indeed be his wife, she looked at

him with unaffected surprise. Their engagement seemed to her only the continuation of a state of things to which she had never anticipated any interruption ; their relations approved, their friends congratulated ; they corresponded during the university terms, and spent the vacations together at Grantley. They sat in the gardens, they strolled in the woods. He taught her to ride, and she sketched for him his favourite hunters. He made her read Walton's "Angler;" and while he fished she sat patiently for hours by his side, holding in her breath lest she should frighten the trout away. In the autumn many a time did she walk across the turnip-fields to meet him, and to hear how many brace of partridges he had killed, and how well Juno had pointed ; and on many a misty morning in winter did she ride on the white pony he had given her, to see the hounds meet and to watch for the distant view-halloo ! In the evening they sat in the old library and examined

together the map of his estates ! She learned the name of every village, and planned new roads and new plantations. They retired to the billiard-room that he might knock the balls about, and make all sorts of hazards before her wondering eyes ; or to a recess in the drawing-room, that he might conquer her at chess ; or to the pianoforte to sing together sundry duets, while Walter Sydney, then a shy and silent youth, laid down his book and listened ; and his mother (who, having found nothing but disappointment in her own marriage, watched a love-affair with that tender interest which the sight of happiness, understood but not experienced, awakens in a gentle and subdued spirit) invariably grew absent at whist and revoked ; an enormity which her husband justly resented, though he bore it in his own opinion with truly angelic patience, only suddenly putting down his cards, and saying in a mild impressive manner—

“Pray, Mrs. Sydney, may I be allowed to ask *are you playing at whist, or are you not?*”

This produced a start, a readjustment of the spectacles on her nose, and a renewed attention to the game, coupled with the ejaculation “Dear children! They seem made for each other!” And so these dear children seemed to think, for they troubled their heads singularly little about any one else.

And thus the course of their true love ran on as smooth as if Shakespeare had not pronounced against the existence of such a case. And their's *was* true love, in spite of Shakespeare, in spite of approving parents, in spite of the easy channel which favourable circumstances had wrought for it. True happiness it was when on a lovely summer's day Henry Leslie and his bride went to the village church and pledged their faith to each other in the eyes of their delighted families and of a rejoicing tenantry; when the bells

rang their loudest peal of joy, and heartfelt acclamations rent the air, as they walked down the narrow pathway towards their home.

And there was happiness in that home, for they tasted that bliss of paradise, which alone, Cowper says, has survived the fall. Neither temper nor neglect shed one bitter drop into their crystal cup : while it lasted, it was unimpaired and pure. A child was born to them, the Margaret of our story, and when she was carried to the village church and the sacred waters of baptism poured on her infant head by the same hand which had joined theirs in marriage, Mary looked at her husband, and in that look there was perhaps too much happiness for this world of ours. Two years later a grave was dug under the yew tree in the old church-yard, and to it was conveyed all that remained on earth of the blooming bride, of the young mother, of the Mary who had so often played as a child on that spot, and who had



chosen it herself for her grave, when a few days before her death, supported by her husband, she had reached the place where their first words of love had been spoken and where she now wished to be buried, that he might never look upon that view or sit under that tree without a thought of her

“Who in her spring-time died.”

At her request no boasting inscription, no pompous memorial was placed on her tomb ; the date of her birth, of her marriage, and of her death, and a simple stone cross alone marked the spot. Henry Leslie had flung himself on the ground in an agony of grief on the day of her funeral, and when Walter Sydney spoke words of comfort to him, he shook his head despairingly, and bade him be silent, for life had lost for him all the bright hues with which youth and hope had gilded it. Truly had he loved his wife, and truly had he mourned for her ; but what is true is

not always deep, and what is vehement is not always lasting. After many days had come and gone his grief grew calm ; and then new hopes and interests arose, and other joys and other pains, and various alternations of misery and of bliss visited him in the course of fifteen years which he spent partly in Italy, partly in the Peninsula where he served as a volunteer, and subsequently in long voyages by sea and land. Meanwhile there was one at home who visited, day by day, the grave where the friend of his childhood and of his youth was buried, and who gathered and treasured up in secret the spring-flowers that grew there ; and there was one blooming flower which he watched with unremitting love and care. Walter Sydney's affections were few and deep ; for the child of Henry and of Mary Leslie he would willingly have laid down his life. Much as his books and his writings usually absorbed him, there was no day and no

hour, that he would not lay them gladly aside, if a merry peal of laughter summoned him to his window to welcome a little horsewoman proudly mounted on her Shetland pony.

Henry Leslie had left his child in the care of his parents at Grantley ; both had died during his absence, and Margaret had been entrusted to Mrs. Dalton, an old fashioned governess, whose plans of education were superintended by Mrs. Thornton who was established at the vicarage, and by Walter Sydney, in whom Leslie had more confidence than in any member of his own family. It was lucky for the little girl that such was the case, for, an only child, an heiress, and a beauty, she ran considerable risk of being utterly spoiled, if Walter had not watched over her with a father's care and a brother's tenderness. He soon discovered in her character those impetuous qualities which are equally powerful for good or for evil according to the direction which they take. The

overweening indulgence with which she was constantly treated, had at least, among many evils, one good result; Margaret was the truest of human beings, and from the moment that she first lisped a few words in baby language, no falsehood had ever passed her lips. There was no moral courage in this; it was the result of a frank and fearless nature, and of an education which, though it had not sufficiently checked the bad, had not impaired the good impulses of her character. There was no merit in it, I repeat; but it was beautiful—as a bright day, as a clear sky, as a pure lake are beautiful! It was something fresh from the hands of God and unspoiled by man: and often when Walter gazed into the child's blue eyes, or parted the curls which clustered on her fair open brow, the words of commendation which our Lord pronounced on Nathanael rose to his mind, and he would murmur, as he pressed the little girl to his heart,—“One in whom there is indeed no guile.”

As she grew older, and became conscious of thoughts which her grandmother and her governess could not comprehend, and of capacities which they knew not how to direct and therefore strove to stifle; like the unskilful husbandman who would dam up the stream he knows not how to turn; she went to Walter, and to him she revealed them in language which he understood, for genius has a simplicity of its own which appreciates and is appreciated by the simplicity of childhood. When she first perceived that religion meant something beyond going to church once a week, and repeating the catechism by rote, that poetry was not merely verse-making—that conversation was not always mere talk—that life was not child's play; when its forms and its spirit—its realities and its mysteries—appeared to her in a new shape, and with a strange power; it was again to Walter that she turned, and from him that she learned glorious truths which give

to our destiny a meaning, and to our actions an end. He gave her books, and while he carefully guarded her mind from what might taint, he filled it with high thoughts and noble images. Self-sacrifice in every form was the theme of his lessons, the object of his reverence; and Margaret listened with a kindling eye and a flushing cheek when he recited deeds of heroism, and lauded acts of self-conquest, the real true courage of the soul; when he spoke of the honour due to the martyr who dies for his Faith, to the patriot who bares his breast to a thousand foes, to the missionary who confesses Christ with the scalping-knife before his eyes, to the Sister of Charity who braves the horrors of pestilence in the loathsome abodes of disease; and lastly, not least, to those lonely martyrs—to those unnoticed confessors—to those meek souls who in the humble walks of life, in desolation unrepining, go through a fiery trial, with no witness but that God,

“ Who to the wrestlings of the lonely heart,  
Imparts the virtue of His midnight agony.

He taught her that self-denial practised in secret, and pangs endured in silence for conscience' sake, no less deserve the palm of martyrdom than the courage that carries a man to the scaffold or the stake. He illustrated his meaning by various examples ; he called her attention to those heroic actions which are sometimes performed by the poor with such sublime simplicity, such unconscious magnanimity. For instance, he made her read and compare the historical record of the noble answer of Louis XII. of France, when in the presence of an applauding court, he pronounced that sentence, which has been handed down to an admiring posterity, “ It is not for the King of France to avenge the injuries of the Duke of Orleans ;” with the police reports of an obscure trial in the newspaper of the day, in which a poor collier bruised and disfigured by a

cruel assault, begged off his brutal enemy all punishment, and refused all pecuniary compensation, simply urging that the man had a wife and children and could not well spare the money, and that he would himself take it as a great favour if the magistrate would *pass it over*; \* and he asked her if the monarch's deed was not of those that have indeed their own reward on earth, and the collier's did not number among those which are laid up as treasure in Heaven—there, where the rust of human applause does not dim, and the moth of human vanity does not consume their merits, and forestall their recompense? The virtues of the poor!—Their countless trials!—Their patient toil!—Their sublime because unknown and unrequited sacrifices! History does not record them. Multitudes do not applaud them. The doers of such deeds travel on their weary journey through life, and go down to their graves,

\* See a similar example in a trial in the *Times*. September 1844.



unknown, unnoticed, though perchance not unwept by some obscure sufferers like themselves ; but a crown is laid up for them, there—where many first shall be last, and many last shall be first ! Wearied creatures who after working all day with aching heads perhaps, or a low fever consuming them, creep out at night to attend on some neighbour more wretched than themselves, and carry to them a share of their own scanty meal. Mothers who toil all day, and nurse at night sickly and peevish children. Men, who with the racking cough of consumption, and the deadly languor of disease upon them, work on, and strive and struggle and toil, till life gives way. Parents whose children cry to them for food when they have none to give. Beings tempted on every side, starved into guilt, baited into crime ;—who still resist, who do *not* kill, who do *not* steal, who do *not* take the wages of iniquity, who do *not* curse and slander—and who, if

they do *not* covet, are indeed of those of whom “the world is not worthy.” And *we—we* the self-indulgent—we the very slaves of luxury and ease—we who can hardly bear a toothache or a sleepless night; *we* go among the poor, and (if they are *that* to be which, must require a higher stretch of virtue than we have ever contemplated) give them a nod of approval, or utter a cold expression of approbation. They have done their duty, and had they *not* done it, had they fallen into the thousand snares which poverty presents, had the pale mother snatched for the famishing child a morsel of food, had the sorely-tempted and starving girl pawned for one day the shirt in her keeping, stern Justice would have overtaken them, and Mercy closed her ears to their cries. And if they have *not* transgressed the law of the land, but for a while given over the struggle in despair, and sat down in their miserable garrets with fixed eyes and folded arms, and resorted to the tempo-

rary madness of gin, or the deadly stupor of laudanum, then we (who into our very homes often admit men whose whole lives are a course of idleness and selfish excess), turn from them in all the severity of our self-righteousness; and on the wretched beings who perhaps after years of secret struggles yield at last—not to passion, not to vanity, but to *hunger*,—with despair in their heart and madness in their brain,—we direct a glance, which we *dare* not cast on guilt and depravity when it meets us in our crowded drawing-rooms, in all the pomp and circumstance of guilty prosperity!

Such were Walter's thoughts, such were his sympathies; and though he seldom declaimed on the subject, he felt deeply, and acted accordingly. His influence over Margaret was great, but it affected her way of thinking more than her mode of life. He could inspire her with a love for what was great and good, but it is only by a course of

patient and diligent training bestowed on a child, or resolutely practised in after-life by ourselves, that we learn not merely to feel but to do; not only to admire but to imitate.

It is not to be imagined that because Margaret's mind was naturally formed to admire what was heroic, and had been trained by Walter to appreciate the true heroism of patience and self-denial, that at the present time of her life she was either a heroine or a model of self-control. His lessons and his example were so far useful to her, that they presented to her mind an ideal standard which prevented her from looking upon her own character and habits with the complacency which she would otherwise have indulged; for it must be confessed, that whereas at times her heart beat high at the ideal glories of Joan of Arc or the Maid of Saragossa, at others it beat with a very hurried pulsation at the least appearance of danger threatening the pretty Mistress of

Grantley. It must be owned, that though her eyes would fill with tears at the account of two Sisters of Charity setting out on foot from Paris in one of the coldest winters of this century to go and nurse the sick at Barcelona, and never leaving the afflicted town till the plague had passed away, she was apt to shut herself up for days together in her comfortable boudoir, with her little feet on the fender, and her graceful figure reclining in the softest and most luxurious arm-chair, because it was too cold, or too wet, to venture out to the cottages or the school, and that Mrs. Dalton going alone would do just as well, especially as her grandmamma was so afraid of her catching cold. I wish that it was not on record that Margaret had been heard to declare on other occasions, that there never was such nonsense as her grandmother's fancies about her catching cold.

It is true that she read with enthusiasm the

lives of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and St. Margaret of Scotland—those loveliest of women, those gentlest of saints, daughters of a royal race, and the brides of heroes—who with their own hands attended upon lepers, and nursed with a mother's tenderness those from whom their own mothers turned with disgust ; but it is unfortunately equally true that she could hardly bring herself to visit Mrs. Jones, an old woman in the village whom Walter had particularly recommended to her notice, because her room was intolerably close, and that she was apt to show her the wound in her leg.

It is true, that as she heard the account of Mrs. Fry's first visit to Newgate, when, quietly shutting the door behind her, she advanced alone, the Bible in her hand, among the fierce and reckless women who at that time were controlled only by armed men, and addressed them as sisters and as friends, in those tones and with that

expression which none can conceive who have not heard her, and which those who have can never forget—it is true, that as she listened, her heart burned within her, and she longed to go and do likewise; but at the next opportunity of exercising courage, of conquering disinclination, of enduring pain, or overcoming weariness, these high resolves and noble projects were apt to vanish into air, or to swell that amount of “good intentions” with which St. Bernard tells us that Hell is paved. The fact must be confessed, Margaret was a spoiled child.

Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, who were perfectly unlike each other in every other respect, concurred in one line of conduct, that of indulging and flattering her to the utmost extent. He was one of those gentle, kind-hearted persons, who can see no imperfections in those they love, and though not himself deficient in understanding, would praise his wife’s singular good

sense, and Margaret's extraordinary docility, in a way which severely tried the patience of his old friend, Mr. Sydney, Walter's father.

Mrs. Thornton was a good woman ; nobody could deny *that* ; but to her goodness she joined a profound conviction of her own wisdom ; a steady, simple-minded conceit, which carried her through every circumstance of life with an amount of self-gratulation, and through every conversation with a degree of authoritative folly, that was inexpressibly amusing. She was unboundedly credulous, and had a habit of adopting opinions put forward by others as her own, and of maintaining them dogmatically, in happy unconsciousness of their incompatibility with those she had herself advanced a quarter of an hour before. She was never startled at anything, never surprised, never puzzled, by the grossest inconsistencies or embarrassed by the most direct evidence. Between her and Mr. Sydney there was a close



alliance, joined to a little tacit enmity. She kept him in a state of mingled irritation and amusement. There never was any occasion of meeting, whether at dinner, luncheon, picnic, or party, that she was not by his side, pouring into his ear oracular sayings, political axioms, mysterious predictions, theological denunciations, and scientific discoveries, to all of which he responded by a short sudden laugh, or if she looked for further encouragement, by an assenting growl. On the subject of education, Mrs. Thornton adopted in turn the most contradictory theories, but they succeeded each other so rapidly that they usually evaporated in talk, and as nothing ensures success so much as fixity of purpose, Margaret's very fixed determination *not* to be managed, outlived all the systems of management which her grandmother successively adopted.

Mrs. Dalton, when she first came into power, had made an effort to establish her authority, but

the attempt had so signally failed, owing to the steady resistance of her pupil, seconded by her grandmother's unequivocal support, that poor Mrs. Dalton was forced to strike her colours, and abandon the unequal contest, contenting herself in future with a display of power which was rather agreeable than otherwise to Margaret, who treated her governess somewhat as the subjects of a constitutional monarchy treat their sovereigns, professing humbly to obey them, as long, and just as long, as their will is in perfect accordance with their own.

Having thus attempted to give some notion of our heroine's character, education, and position in life, we will now turn to the library, where, after some hours of vain expectation, the party, assembled to welcome Colonel Leslie's arrival, were about to break up for that night.

"Another day of expectation! another day of disappointment!" exclaimed Margaret, as she

held out her hand for the candlestick which Walter was lighting for her on her way to the door. "Is it not extraordinary that my father does not come or write?"

"It is indeed," answered Walter. "When you left him in town, he told you positively that he would be here yesterday. Did he not?"

"Yes, to be sure he did, and actually held out his finger to me at parting. Do not look angry, Walter! You know how anxious I had been to see my father; with what joy I heard the news of his arrival after this long absence, and with what impatience, what emotion, I hastened to meet him in London. During the tedious hours of the journey I had but that one thought. During the night we stopped at Newbury, I never closed my eyes—listened to the striking of each hour, and longed for daylight; and when we reached London, when we dashed through the streets, I could hardly sit still; and when I arrived—(I shall

always hate that hotel)—‘Colonel Leslie was out!’ ‘Gone out for a walk!’ I sat down alone in that square odious drawing-room, and waited—waited two hours! and then he came in—”

“And was not his manner kind then?”

“Oh dear, yes! very kind. Nobody is ever unkind to me. Dr. Bartlet, or Lord Donnington, when they call here, are very kind. Come, Walter, do not let us deceive ourselves. I have never had a thought I have not told you, and I must e’en out with it. My father does not care a straw about me, and the sooner I make up my mind to it the better. I shall be a dutiful daughter to him, at least I’ll try,” she said, quoting the burden of an Irish song she had just been practising, and smiling though two big tears were rolling down her cheek.

“This is unreasonable, dear Margaret,” said Walter. “You had worked yourself up into a state of romantic excitement about your father’s arrival,

and pictured in your own imagination a scene that was not realised ; and because poor Leslie's manner is naturally quiet—”

“ Is *your's* so very vivacious ? ” interrupted Margaret, with rather a sauey expression.

“ Oh, mine ! Mine is the manner of an old dog, who cannot help wagging his tail when he sees those he loves.”

“ O Walter ! dearest Old Walter ! I wish you were my father.”

A strange expression passed over Walter's face, but he answered :

“ Well, I cannot say I do, for I should then deprive Leslie of a treasure which I am sure he values ; and you do not know, Margaret, how much I love your father.”

“ Not more than *me* ? ”

Walter looked as if he could not very well love anything more than the beautiful little creature before him, but he shook his head, and said :

“Come, come, Margaret, you must be contented to give way to others. You are too fond of the *first place* everywhere.”

Mrs. Thornton joined them while Walter was speaking, and instantly took up the cudgels for Margaret :

“And so she should be ; she has always been brought up to it ; and who should have the first place among us, if it is not Margaret ? As to your vexing yourself, my dear, about your father’s not being glad to see you, it is foolish, really very foolish, because—”

“I did not say he was not glad to see me,” interrupted Margaret, with a heightened colour, for she did not always bear with patience her grandmamma’s animadversions.

“But, my dear, how should he be glad to see you ? It is only by proving people that we learn to love them,” and she glanced at Walter with a glimmering notion that that last phrase had been

in his line ; “ I never loved my children when I did not know them.”

“ And when was that ? ” asked Margaret, somewhat captiously, for it must be confessed that her temper was a little ruffled that day.

“ When they went to school, my dear, I always said to my boys, ‘ Now, my dears, I have done with you ; I have nothing more to say to you. No school-boys ever care for their mothers, so I wash my hands of you. Don’t talk to me till you are grown up ; don’t let me hear of you ; don’t come near me ! ’ ”

“ I do not remember,” remarked Walter, “ that John and Eustace obeyed your instructions. They seemed to me to stick close enough to you during the holidays.”

“ Oh, they never minded a word I said to them,” replied Mrs. Thornton. “ I always was a cypher, a nothing, a nonentity to them. They would follow me about because I gave them

sugar-plums, but they did not love me, they did not care for me ; there was no link between us."

Again she glanced at Walter, for that last expression had been decidedly poetical, and this time it was not lost upon him, for he smiled, as he again presented the candlestick to Margaret, and was about to reply, when the sound of carriage wheels, the barking of the dogs, and the loud ringing of the bell, announced the arrival of Colonel Leslie to his home after ten years' absence. The doors were flung open, two dogs rushed in, Margaret stepped forward, Mrs. Thornton looked flurried ; Mr. Thornton, whose gout prevented his rising as rapidly as he could have wished, stretched out his hand, while on his fine open venerable face a joyous smile said "Welcome," better than any words would have done. Walter looked graver than usual. Colonel Leslie kissed Margaret on the forehead, shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, and then



wrung Walter's in silence. And then there followed one of those spaces of time which are spent by every person present in trying to look very happy, and to feel happy, while they can hardly resist the consciousness that they are extremely uncomfortable, and yet that it is imperative not to suffer themselves or others to think so. Colonel Leslie, indeed, did not seem to think it necessary to make much effort. He sat down in an arm-chair and poked the fire. Mr. Thornton smiled, took snuff, cleared his throat, and then asked him (how difficult to find a question to put to a man whom you have not seen for ten years) if he had had a pleasant journey. Mrs. Thornton, who seldom allowed anybody to answer a question for themselves when she was present, took the words out of Colonel Leslie's mouth, by asking him in return, "How could it be a pleasant journey, my dear? How can you expect a man, who has travelled all over

the world like Leslie, to see anything to admire at home in our poor little country ? ”

“ Why, my dear Mrs. Thornton,” blurted out her husband, who had through life persevered in reasoning with her, a practice which other people had generally dropped, “ you might as well say that Leslie would have no pleasure in seeing us all again, because he has been used to a set of queer foreign-looking faces.”

There was a dead pause ; somehow or other this last speech seemed to have disconcerted Colonel Leslie, and Mr. Thornton to have felt the moment that he had uttered it, that it would have been better left unsaid. This redoubled the embarrassment of the whole party. Margaret, whose cheek had been deepening in colour ever since her father’s arrival, felt it was quite incumbent upon her to speak. First she looked at Walter, but he had sat himself down by the fire, his long face longer than usual ; his long legs

extended before him, beyond what appeared their natural size, and his eyes fixed on the fire as if they would never look on anything else again. At last by some happy inspiration she seized on the front paws of one of the fine dogs which had come in with her father, placed them on her knees without any regard for her white muslin gown, and said timidly as she glanced at Colonel Leslie. "What a beautiful creature this is, papa!"

He started as if from a reverie, looked attentively at her, sighed deeply, and by a sudden impulse held out his hand. Margaret seized it, drew near to him, and from that moment a considerable thaw took place in the general aspect of things. Tea was brought in for the second time, and Walter, who had perceived the affectionate look which Leslie had cast on his daughter, and the renewed expression of pleasure in those eyes in which he could never bear to see a cloud, shook

off his oppressive gravity. He and his friend began to talk of their former haunts and old acquaintances ; Mrs. Thornton, who, like the canary birds, always chirped the louder when others conversed, was encouraged to hold forth again in her usual tone ; and her husband slowly recovered from that painful shock, the consciousness of having said the wrong thing at the wrong time. And now we must, in another chapter, explain why Mr. Thornton's remark had better not have been made, and how it came to add to the embarrassment of the assembled family at Grantley Manor.

## CHAPTER II.

A short time after the death of his wife, Henry Leslie had left England in order to travel for a few months in Italy. The change of scene, and the excitement of the journey, to a man of twenty-three, who had never before been out of his own country-town, soon roused him from the depression which had driven him from his home to seek health and amusements abroad; and by the time he had travelled through France, and spent a few weeks at Turin and at Milan, he was just in that state of mind and of feelings which most readily admits new impressions. The acuteness of grief had subsided, and a vague desire for fresh interests and new excitements had taken its place. A latent taste for painting and for poetry,

for the artistic and imaginative side of life, took strong possession of Leslie's fancy as he advanced into Italy. The influence of its brilliant skies—the magic of its natural beauties—the memories of the past—its departed glory and its living charm—operated more and more powerfully on his soul; and for the time being the quiet English country gentleman was transformed into a passionate admirer of that strange land whose very name is a spell; whose very defects are attractions; where desolation is bewitching; suffering poetical, and poverty picturesque; where life resembles a dream—where the past is almost more tangible than the present—where an eternal vitality springs from the bosom of perpetual decay, like pure flowers floating on the surface of a dark and stagnant pool; life in its brightest and most glowing colours—death in its most poetical and soothing form, meet each other at every turn. With her cloudless skies and her tideless seas—the un-

changing gray of her olive groves—the brilliant hues of her mountains and of her streams—the solemn silence of her cypress groves—the noisy throngs of her joyous people — her gorgeous churches, with their myriads of living worshippers—her gigantic tombs, with their countless multitude of unknown tenants, Italy is at once and emphatically the land of the living and the land of the dead. This Leslie felt; he did not seek society—he did not enter into noisy amusements—he left his hours and his days to take their natural course—he floated down the current of life, while Nature and Art unrolled before him visions of beauty and scenes of enchantment which appear to those whose souls they touch, not as novelties, but as the realisation of a presentiment or of a dream. Have we not, some of us, in our hours of sleep, known a land, a spot, a home, which in our dreams we recognise—which, in our waking hours, we sometimes long to visit again?

Have we not at times, in performing the commonest actions of life, in opening a book, in shutting a window, in meeting (for the hundredth time perhaps) with a person, experienced a sudden strange unaccountable feeling, which suggests to us, in what appears a supernatural manner, that we have done *that* action, thought *that* thought, met *that* person in the same manner before, and yet the whole impression is independent of the memory, and is more a sensation than a thought? Such was the effect that the first sight of the Campagna of Rome produced upon Leslie; he had lingered at Genoa and at Florence; he had become thoroughly imbued with the order of ideas and of taste which creates in men a sort of new sense and new perceptions. I dwell much upon that change in the whole intellectual being which is caused by a series of impressions and associations which, but a short while before, were as strange to the mind they visit as colours to



the born blind, because it partly accounts for the sudden fancy which soon after took possession of Leslie's feelings.

As he was standing one morning on the steps of the church of St. John Lateran, and gazing on the view before him, he exclaimed, half aloud :  
“*This is Rome, indeed ! I recognise her here !*”

A young man, who was sitting on the steps with a drawing before him, heard these words, looked up, and while a bright sudden Italian smile flashed on his dark countenance, without speaking he nodded assent. This silent gesture made them acquainted, and a few words passed between them. This young man was a painter, and as Leslie glanced at his work he was struck with the extraordinary talent which it evinced. The vague, mysterious, melancholy beauty of the Campagna ; the contrast between the brilliancy of its colouring and its utter desolation ; was so truly rendered in the hasty sketch before him, that, pointing to it, he said in bad Italian but with a smile :

“And this, also, is Rome !”

“Ah, not more like Rome,” exclaimed the young artist, “than the creations of man are like the works of nature ! What I can do with *these*,” he added, holding up his palette and his brushes, “is so unlike what I see *there*, (pointing to the Campagna), or *here* ! (touching his own forehead). It is a great pain to conceive vividly, and to render faintly !”

This was said so earnestly and unaffectedly, that Leslie instantly felt inclined to like and to know more of the young painter. Words sometimes affect us in a singular manner. A phrase, a sentiment which we may often have heard before, at times unaccountably arrests our attention; touches, perhaps, some chord which, by a remote and scarcely perceptible vibration, reaches our own heart, and by a kind of magnetic power instantaneously produces sympathy between us and the speaker. In this case it may have been that the

Italian's melancholy and passionate love of his art, the disproportion which he simply expressed in a few words between the creations of his fancy and the work of his hands, answered to the feelings of one, who like Leslie, under a cold and quiet manner, hid a keen sensibility and a lively imagination. To be a poet in the very depths of his soul, and to find no words in which to give life and form to the thoughts which struggle within him; to feel the might of genius and the strength of inspiration; to be conscious of the fire which consumes him in secret, and to have no mould in which to cast the burning torrent; to feel the sacred flame dying away for lack of air and light to make glad or mournful music in his secret soul, and never hear with his outward ears one note of those mysterious melodies vibrate through the air; to feel that he can love with passion, or thrill with indignation, while his voice is mute, his hands weak, and his eyes dim, is a

pain that has, probably, been experienced by many a shy and silent man ; one whom the wayfaring man and the fool, the babbler of many words, or the scribbler of many pages, has passed by with indifference or gazed at with contempt ; and it is to such as these that one word, one look, comes sometimes with a strange power, and unlocks in an instant the flood-gates which have been closed for years.

The acquaintance which had commenced on the steps of St. John Lateran soon ripened into intimacy. Leslie's fiery and poetic nature, which the quiet round of domestic duties and interests and the mild light of an early and unthwarted affection had not roused, now sprang into existence, or rather became conscious of its own strength, and in Leonardo Ferrari he found a companion whose character and tastes were at this moment exactly suited to his own. He was an enthusiast and an artist. At once indo-

lent and eager, simple in his character, and impassioned in his language, he was a true Italian. In his romance, there was a nature; in his passion, a simplicity; in his eyes, a fire; and in his manner, a languor which characterises that nation, and seems a type of that country, which one of their poets so mournfully addresses—

“Deh, tu fossi men bella, o almen più forte,  
Ond’ assai più ti paventasse o assai  
T’amassi men.”

For two months Leslie and Leonardo spent such days together as can be spent in Rome alone. Among the ruins of departed glory, scattered as natural ornaments among the fairest and most fantastic scenes that nature ever created; among the relics of a stupendous human power; amidst the memorials of a divine and eternal faith; in the catacombs, those dark palaces of the glorious dead; in the matchless arena, where the blood of martyrs has washed away the foul stains of heathen

idolatry, and the image of the Dying Gladiator fades before that of the Saint who yielded his body to the lions, and committed his soul to his God; in the aisles of St. Peter's, in the galleries of the Vatican, in the gardens of the Villa Doria, they wandered together. Many a lonely church, many a deserted villa, many a silent pine-grove they visited in the twilight hour; and in the day Leslie was often in the studio, where Leonardo worked with that religious devotion to his art, which belonged more to a past than to the present era, and recalled the days when an artist seldom seized a pencil to trace on his canvas the image of our Lord, of his blessed mother, or of the saints, without first kneeling to pour forth his soul in prayer. Leslie learnt Italian, and for the first time read the sublime works in that language, as he sat on the broken marble sarcophagus, which formed the garden-seat of Leonardo's studio. A few flowers grew in that court—a small fountain played in

the centre, and two imprisoned birds sung their wild notes over his head. The Italian sun shed its intense light on the walls of the studio, and Leslie's eyes often wandered from his book to the canvas, to which the artist was transplanting one of his mental visions. The subject he had chosen was the resurrection of Jairus's daughter, and into this picture the painter had thrown his whole soul: there was but one figure in it, that of the maiden rising from the bed of death. The expression of her face, her attitude, told the story (if one may so speak) better than if the figures of our Lord, of his apostles, of her parents, and of the scoffers who in that solemn hour became believers, had been also depicted; and imagination portrayed them more vividly, perhaps, than if the hand of the artist had designed them. The countenance of the little maiden was so holy—there was at once such awe and such serenity in the expression of those large eyes, which an instant before had been

closed in death ; a vague regret for the vision that was flown—a dawning joy for the life that was regained : on her brow the seal of another world, whose threshold she had passed ; on her half-opened lips, a welcome for that to which she was restored ;—that as Leslie gazed on his picture day after day, his imagination was more and more captivated by its divine and its earthly beauty. He thought that he had never seen anything so fair in form, or so angelic in expression, as the maiden of Leonardo's design.

One day that he was seated in his favourite retreat and reading the “Jerusalemme,” he had just paused after that line which forms the touching conclusion of Clorinda's history, “*Passa la bella donna e per che dorma.*” He fixed his eyes on the strip of deep blue sky which stretched over the narrow court, and mused in silence over the incomparable beauty of that passage. He was startled from his reverie by an exclamation of



Leonardo's, who, with folded arms, was contemplating his canvas :

“ Not so beautiful—not so holy as *her* face, by one half ! ”—And he broke his brush into pieces, and threw the fragments into the court, where they fell at Leslie's feet, who picked them up with a smile at this impassioned manner of venting a moment's discouragement, and inquired who the ideal might be that could throw into shade the creation before them.

“ Do you not know ? ” said Leonardo ; “ my sister, Ginevra, of course. *That* is her portrait, but it is not really like her. There is more soul in one look of her eyes, more thought in her pensive brow, more love in the expression of her mouth, than ever Raphael or Domenichino painted ; and what can I do ? Alas ! I wish sometimes that I had never seen her, or that she was not so beautiful. It makes me hate my pictures ! ”

“And break your brushes,” observed Leslie, as he collected the pieces ; “but I am sorry, Leonardo, that that design of your’s is a portrait. I have always disliked that practice of introducing living persons into ideal scenes, especially where the subject is religious.”

“But what,” cried Leonardo, “what is so religious as Ginevra’s face ? You have never seen her at her prayers ?”

“Never anywhere,” replied Leslie, with a smile. “I wish I had.”

“I have sometimes gone to the church of San Giovanni, when the rays of the setting sun have been pouring a rich flood of light through the painted windows of the choir, at the hour when she kneels at the altar rail to say her evening prayer. O, Leslie, I have gazed upon her, till I have been frightened at the halo of light which has played about her brow, and fancied that she might be translated from earth to heaven in a

sudden extasy of devotion. Alas ! that I should not have been glad ! It reassured me to see the golden lights round Mother Agnese's ugly head. I knew *she* would not go straight to heaven, whatever Ginevra did ! ”

“ Where does your sister live ? ” asked Leslie.

“ At home in Verona,” replied the young artist.

There is something in the sound of *Verona*, which, to an Englishman, is at once familiar as a household name, and romantic as the very dream of a poet. It speaks to the imagination as Italy does ; it touches the heart like the haunts of our youth. Nature, architecture, the associations of history, the traces of the middle ages, and of the glories of Lombardy adorn it on one hand ; and on the other, genius has made it our own, and has thrown over it a spell which can never be broken as long as Englishmen read Shakespeare, and glory that *his* language is their mother tongue, and *his* great name compatriot with their own.

Leslie was twenty-three ; he had gone through a period of happiness and a period of grief which had taught him what both were, without, in either case, reaching the highest intensity of which these feelings are susceptible. He had grieved, and his heart had been softened ; his grief had passed away, and his imagination had been excited. He had passed through scenes, he had studied a language, which had roused all the dormant romance of his nature ; and he had not lost the habit which characterises Englishmen at all times of their lives, more especially if they are only sons and heirs to large fortunes, of doing what they please, how they please, and when they please ; and all these circumstances being taken into consideration, it will not, perhaps appear very surprising, that on the day that followed this conversation in the studio, Leslie and Leonardo, in a little open britska, were flying over the Campagna in the direction of Bologna,

and with the ultimate intention of visiting Verona. Leslie had evinced a sudden wish to see Juliet's tomb and Capulet's house; still more, perhaps, to become acquainted with the original of the picture he had so long watched and admired; and when he proposed to Leonardo to accompany him, and to take this opportunity of visiting his family, his purpose was confirmed by that indescribable Italian smile, so unlike anything which ever flashes across a northern countenance, (as different from our smiles, as their sun is to our sun), but which anybody may witness who will give a penny to the first little Italian he meets in the street: it will shine on his poor face, through all the dirt and depression of poverty, as the glorious sun through the smoke and the fog of a London atmosphere. Be that, however, as it may, it is certain that Leonardo smiled, that Leslie was delighted, and that after a few days spent at Bologna, they crossed the plain

of Lombardy in the night, and arrived at Verona early in the morning. The Piazza delle Erbe at Verona, is certainly one of the most enchanting scenes in the world, especially at eight o'clock in the morning, on a sunny day in May. It combines all that the imagination can combine, to make a market-place beautiful to the eye. Think of whatever has charmed you most in the quaint, angular, richly-ornamented architecture of the middle ages—think of forms and projections, of contrasts in colours, which are at once startling and harmonious—think of fountains throwing out of their marble mouths torrents of sparkling water—think of heaps of gigantic carnations and gorgeous hyacinths, such as you seldom see but in Dutch pictures, lying about in wanton profusion, and exhaling odours which might, indeed, make

“The light wings of Zephyr wax faint with perfume.”

Think of picturesque groups of dark-eyed

women, with their white mezzaros and their coral necklaces, holding out to you bundles of these flowers. Turn from them and glance down the street which opens on the market-place; fix your eyes on a small wooden balcony—for it is the balcony of the Capulet House, and the Capulet crest surmounts the doorway—the form of Juliet rises before you as you gaze, and a voice in your ear seems to whisper the very words of Romeo.

Then think of the torrents of light, of the golden splendour, which the Italian sun sheds on those fantastic buildings—on those bright waters, on those gorgeous flowers—those dark-eyed women. Think of the busy hum of men, of the rapid glances, of the wild smiles, which give life to that magic scene, of the romantic associations which make your own heart beat at the name of Verona; and then say, whether to arrive there, on that very Piazza delle Erbe, on a delicious morning

in May, was not enough to make Leslie exclaim with Italian enthusiasm and English earnestness—

“ There is no world without Verona’s walls.”

Ginevra was more beautiful than Leonardo’s design ; no canvas has ever borne the semblance of so lovely a creature ; no poet’s language has ever described the passionate languor of her dark eyes ; no sculptor’s hand ever moulded a fairer form than hers ; the wavering and broken lights that flit on the surface of a stormy sea, are not more varied than the gleams which passed over her face as hope and joy, passion or tenderness, love or scorn, animated her faultless features. When Leslie first beheld her, she was standing under the portico of the villa where Leonardo had preceded him, and holding her brother’s hand in hers, she extended the other to him, while she said, in that tongue the very sound of which is music—



“Oh welcome, to you who have recalled the bloom to his cheek, and the light to his eye. He needed sympathy and you gave it. Your’s shall be the blessing of those who carry the cup of cold water to the lips of the weary traveller. You will stay with us. Will you not, Leonardo’s friend? We have no English comforts,” she continued, changing her earnest manner into a playful one, and glancing at the deserted looking building near which they stood, “but our sun and our orange-trees, uncle Francesco’s books, and Leonardo’s love shall do what they can, and *your* kindness the rest,” she added with an increased softness of accent, and a glance from under her dark eye-lashes which seemed to ask for something more than kindness; and yet Ginevra was no coquette. She was innocent as the child who crowns her head with flowers, and then laughs in the joy of her heart, as she sees herself in the glass; pure as the swan who curves his white neck as he skims

over the water, or the gazelle, who turns her large dark full eye upon you as you pass, for she was as careless of her own beauty as the laughing child, and

“Not the swan on the lake or the deer in the vale”

were more guiltless of a plan or of a design than the niece of Father Francesco, the priest of Rouere, the sister of Leonardo the painter. But her eyes spoke in a way which none but those gazelle-looking eyes can speak; the bright colour in her cheek rose and fell with bewitching rapidity, as Leslie told her tales of other lands beyond those snowy Alps on which they gazed from the orange-gardens of her home; she learned English, which in her little mouth grew soft as her own skies, and she taught him Italian, which in his became the very language of passion; and when under the shade of an elm tree they read together the charming romance of Luigi Porta, he thought her the very ideal of the Italian Juliet;—

when he surprised her one morning at break of day as she stood leaning against a broken column, and holding her empty basket out to show a clamorous crowd of beggars that her store of provisions had come to an end, he almost wished himself one of those beggars who kissed the hem of her garment, and called her saint and angel. Thus, day by day, in every hour, in every action of her life, in each conversation in which she poured forth the bright and pure thoughts of an ardent but guileless mind, and the high aspirations of an eager spirit, he discerned a goodness and a nobleness which answered to the vision his soul had formed of her whose image had rivetted him in Leonardo's studio: when, in the daily tenor of her life, he saw exemplified that simple type of pure religion, and undefiled, which St. James in a few short words describes: "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world:"

then, to the passion which had sprung up in his heart, was joined a reverent and intense admiration, which subdued and hallowed its nature ; but when, with a strong effort, he once spoke of England and departure, Ginevra turned as white as the marble of Carrara which her brother was chiselling, and when Leslie hastily retracted the words, the pomegranate in her hand was pale by the side of her cheek—all this flashed one day on the kind but stern guardian of the orphan girl. Father Francesco, with severe tenderness, bade her shut her ears to the flatteries and shun the presence of the stranger, who knelt not at the same altar as themselves, and who talked of love and not of marriage to his Ginevra. She obeyed ; and Leslie saw the silent struggle of a passion, strong as life, but not stronger than conscience ; and he who had watched, followed her, lived in the light of her dark eyes, who had ceased to care for aught on earth but

her smiles and her tears, or to fear anything but the loss of the idol he had enshrined in his heart with all the impetuosity of his nature, which had never brooked check or control,—he determined, at all risks, to make her his own.

After a few months, into which were crowded the agitations of a life, during which he had to conquer the opposition of Father Francesco, the scruples of Leonardo, and the objections of his own parents; once, to part from Ginevra when insurmountable difficulties seemed to stand in their way; another time, to rush back to her side only just in time to prevent her taking the veil; after fears, hopes, anguish, terrors, emotions, and joys, which made this second era in his life as different from the first as a canto of Dante's from a scene of Metastasio, he became the husband of his beautiful Italian bride.

He was again happy for a time, happy, at least, as far as the present moment went. Ginevra

was all in all to him ; he loved her with that wild idolatry which makes human passion a fearful thing, which seems like the desperate gambler's stake of his whole fortune upon one throw, a garnering up of the soul in one object, a concentration of all the feelings on one sole point. He remained in Italy ; he spent a winter at Rome, a summer on the Lake of Como. He could not bear to transplant his beautiful Southern flower into the blighting atmosphere of the North, or expose her to the cold reception which he knew the prejudices of a hostile family could not but procure to her, and it was well that he did not ! They *had* their bliss : two years of married love : two years spent among nature's fairest scenes : two years of undivided trust, and daily intense happiness : is not that a great deal of bliss for one man's life ? Must not *such* bliss as that decay ? Had it not better cease abruptly, than slowly wither ?

I am unwilling too early in my story to dwell on scenes of gloom, and this is only a retrospective sketch of Colonel Leslie's life. He was once more left alone with a child, another girl, two or three years younger than his little English Margaret. One of those sudden and malignant fevers which make such havoc of human life had carried off in a few days Leslie's second wife, and her last words were to entreat him that her child might be placed under the care of her own relations and brought up in her own faith. Leslie religiously complied with this request. This great catastrophe, this second overthrow of the happiness of his life, did a great and sudden work upon him—the work of years. It sobered, perhaps it hardened him. No one exactly knew in what spirit he bore it. He solemnly consigned his children to their respective families, and then he went to Spain and to India. He grew stern in

manner; some said, heartless in character—cold he certainly was: none knew him well, and few liked him. He is now returned to his home, and we have seen his first arrival there after ten years' absence. His second marriage, though well known at Grantley, had never been openly talked of or acknowledged among the members of his own and his first wife's family. It had ever been an unpleasant topic, a forbidden subject. When Margaret was a very little girl she had once heard Mrs. Thornton whisper to Mrs. Sydney, after her father had been named,—

“My dear Mrs. Sydney, since that sad Italian affair, I have never been able to feel as if he belonged to us, or would ever really be at home with us again. I have quite a horror of Italians.”

Margaret, who had not the least conception what an Italian was, took an opportunity on the following day of asking her governess what her



grandmamma had meant by "that sad Italian affair," and why she had had such "a horror of Italians?"

"Mind your book, and don't ask foolish questions, Miss Margaret," was Mrs. D.'s judicious though not satisfactory answer. When in time Margaret learned more about Italy and Italians, she was still more puzzled, but took every opportunity of talking upon the subject; because, as she observed to one of her little friends :

"When I do so, every body makes a face; grandmamma purses up her mouth, and gazes at the ceiling; Walter frowns and looks at his boots, and grandpapa strokes his chin and begins humming."

"Does he indeed?" asked her companion, who was younger than herself, and who evidently thought these effects must be produced in the same manner as by pulling a string, Punch, Judy

and the hangman are set in motion. "And can you really make them do all that only just by talking of Italy? How very odd!"

That it was not very odd we can now understand, and in the following chapter we will resume the story where we left it.

## CHAPTER III.

ON the day after Colonel Leslie's arrival at Grantley the sun shone brightly as the assembled family met at breakfast with cheerful countenances, and if not all with glad hearts at least with kindly feelings towards each other. It was a hard frost, and the window panes were incrustated with those graceful and fantastic patterns in which we can trace all sorts of fanciful landscapes. The hoar-frost hung lightly on the branches of the trees, and the lawn sparkled with its diamond rays. Margaret sat at the head of the table making tea, the hissing urn before her; her little hands busily managing the old silver teapot, the large coffee cups, and the blue Sèvres cream-jug, and the huge embossed sugar-basin. A cap

with pink ribbons was fastened gracefully at the back of her very small head, her large violet eyes seemed to have borrowed their colour from the hyacinth or the iris, and her voice was sweet and clear as the tone of the silver bell by her side. Four pair of eyes in that room were fixed upon her with fond but very different expressions ; not to mention those of the family pictures which seemed staring at her also, and those of Ebro and Tagus, the two large dogs, who, with wistful countenances, gazed alternately upon her and the buttered cakes before her. As she laid her hand on the black head of one, and thrust a large morsel into the open mouth of the other, she said to Walter—

“ You are not going home to-day, are you ? ”

“ Indeed I must, and immediately after breakfast, too.”

“ Why ? ”

Walter glanced across the table at Colonel

Leslie, who was busily engaged with the newspaper. Margaret, who thought that look implied that it was now her father's business and not her's to press him to stay, coloured and said in a low voice—

“ I am sure he wishes you to stay ; pray do, Walter.”

“ I cannot, indeed ; I am expected at home.”

“ And for what important business, that you put on so serious a manner ?”

“ Nothing *very* important. A friend of mine is coming to us, and I must be at Heron Castle to receive him.”

“ A friend of your's ! How curious I shall be to see him !”

“ Curious ! why curious ?”

“ Oh, because he must be something very wonderful. I never heard of your having a friend before.”

“ I am sorry you think me so utterly friendless.”

“ Oh, not altogether friendless. Grandpapa is your friend, and so am I, and Mr. Killigrew is your friend, and so is the old clerk, and Mrs. Fellowes, too, in a sort of a way; but I never knew you have a friend before on a formal visit to Heron Castle, a friend who kept you from Grantley, and whom you called in that mysterious manner, without naming him at once, ‘a friend of your’s!’ ”

“ There is nothing mysterious about him. His name is Edmund Neville.”

“ The same whose life you saved a few years ago in Ireland? ”

“ Exactly.”

“ O then I know all about him, and I am much relieved.”

“ Why relieved? ”

“ Because I had fancied that your friend would have been a sort of counterpart of yourself.”

“ And *two* such you could never have endured? ”

“ Why, dear Walter, I think you as near perfection as any one can be ; but had your friend been exactly like you, you would have lost your originality, and a bad specimen of you I could not have tolerated.”

“ Well, you may comfort yourself, then, for we are as unlike as possible.”

“ Is he as grateful to you as he ought to be ? ”

“ I do not see what gratitude he owes me.”

“ Did you not save his life ? ”

“ I did by him what I would have done by any human being I had seen in danger of perishing. I see no merit in that.”

“ Merit ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Thornton ; “ no, indeed, my dear Walter, there was no merit in it, except the honour it did to your head and heart ; but it is a bad precedent, indeed it is, to risk one’s own life —— ”

“ It is a precedent not likely to be too often

followed," impatiently interrupted Colonel Leslie.

"What is this story, Walter?"

"Let *me* tell it," said Margaret, eagerly.

Walter shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and she went on :

"It was about nine years ago that it happened, when Walter was staying in Ireland, at Mr. Neville's house —"

"My dear," interrupted Mrs. Thornton, "your father does not care at whose house the accident happened."

"I happen to care," quietly remarked Colonel Leslie, "if it is Mr. Neville of Clantoy; I knew him at Oxford."

"It is," said Walter.

"I remember," rejoined Leslie, "that he was one of the fiercest Orangemen in our debating club. I can remember, now, a violent and eloquent speech he made against Catholic Emancipation. He was a prejudiced but a clever fellow—"



“And such he has been ever since,” returned Walter, “and where his predilections and his antipathies do not bias his judgment, he is an excellent and most upright man; but his early impressions never forsook him, and subsequent events seem to have fixed them in his mind with indelible colours. He had made it a rule not to take a Catholic servant into his house, and had always strictly adhered to it; but his gamekeeper, who was one of those old hereditary domestics who succeed to the keeper’s office and to his lodge with the same regularity as heirs apparent to their ancestral halls, married a Roman Catholic wife, who had brought up her son in her own faith. Knowing the strong prejudices of his master, he had carefully kept this fact from his knowledge, and as he was himself a regular attendant at the parish church, and Mr. Neville was not in the habit of troubling himself about the families of his servants, he knew nothing whatever

of the religious creed of the boy Maxwell, who being in the meantime permitted to become the constant companion of the young heir, and his associate in all field sports and rural amusements, a very strong attachment sprung up between the two youths. One day when they were clambering up trees in the park, John Maxwell broke one of the branches with his weight, and fell heavily to the ground. He was taken up senseless, and it was found that he had suffered a concussion of the brain. After a long confinement, he recovered his bodily, but not his mental health and strength, and exhibited from that time, occasional symptoms of partial derangement. Still, as there was nothing alarming in those symptoms, and the interest of young Neville for his companion was increased by an accident that had befallen him in his service, no interruption of their habits took place. The violence which Maxwell sometimes displayed towards others, was never shown towards Edmund, to

whom he always evinced the most devoted affection. Among other pastimes, the boys were accustomed to scamper over the roof of the old castellated house, and one day that they had mounted there together, Maxwell was seized with one of those sudden and irresistible impulses which are the characteristics of insanity, and clasping his companion in his arms, endeavoured to precipitate him over the battlement. At first, Edmund fancied that he was in jest, but when he found the attempt was real, he struggled with all his might, clung to one of the buttresses with the strength of despair—”

“And he was saved?” interrupted Margaret, turning to her father, “saved by Walter’s intrepidity and presence of mind. He perceived from below the dreadful struggle, and swinging himself, at the peril of his life, from cornice to cornice, he scaled the outside wall of the turret, and reached the roof in time to rescue

the boy from the grasp of the madman, who attacked him in his turn with desperate violence. Was it not so, Walter?"

"It was," he replied. "The scene was short but dreadful. I cannot think of it to this day without shuddering. The servants soon came to my assistance, and the unfortunate youth was secured. From that moment he became a confirmed maniac, and was placed in confinement. This incident, of course, made a great noise all over the country, and many stories concerning it were invented and circulated by the gossips about the place. Amongst others, it was reported that a Catholic priest had employed Maxwell as an instrument towards young Neville's conversion, and had so worked on his mind by spiritual terrors as to drive him to insanity. Mr. Neville had of course been greatly excited by the occurrence, and those false and absurd rumours were very soon conveyed to his ears. He thus learnt, for

the first time, that the constant companion, and very nearly the murderer of his only son, was a Catholic; and though he did not actually credit all the foolish stories which were current in the neighbourhood, his indignation was very great at the deceit which he considered had been practised upon him, and a fresh stimulus was thereby given to those religious antipathies which were already too strongly implanted in his mind, and his hatred of the Catholic religion, and of all who professed it, became more rooted, and assumed a more inveterate character than ever."

"Horrible!" muttered Colonel Leslie.

"Very natural indeed," observed Mrs. Thornton, "to hate the man who has almost killed your child. I really think it quite wicked not to make allowances for people's feelings. Why, to this day I cannot look with any comfort on a Frenchman, since the French-master gave Eustace the scarlet-

fever. He came to him with a face as red, and a throat as sore—”

“Why, my dear,” interrupted Mr. Thornton, “you do not suppose, do you, that the man did it on purpose?”

“I suppose nothing, Mr. Thornton. I assert nothing. I do not wish to judge of people’s motives; but I only maintain that from that day to this, the idea of contagion has been linked in my mind with the very sight of a Frenchman.” And Mrs. Thornton poked the fire with an energy and a conscious freedom from prejudice, that made Leslie and Walter, in spite of themselves, smile as they looked at each other.

Indeed, few things drew a smile from Leslie so readily as some piece of folly or inconsistency in others, and there was something bitterly sarcastic in the curl of his lip and the expression of his half-closed eyes. Even when anything appeared to work on his better feelings, and to inspire him with any

degree of admiration or interest, he seemed not to sneer at others for being great and good, but at himself for being moved to appreciate it, and a bitter jest was generally the fruit of a latent emotion. As he became domesticated at Grantley, and renewed his intimacy with Walter, he could not help respecting his character, and admiring his way of thinking; but unwilling to betray this, he often sought to throw ridicule on his pursuits, if not on himself, in a way which was perfectly indifferent to the object of these attacks, but which tried his daughter's patience severely. Margaret's feelings were warm, and her temper not much under control; her affection for Walter made her peculiarly alive to the least allusion aimed at him in Colonel Leslie's conversation. Sometimes the injured Walter would rouse himself from a fit of abstraction, and observe her cheek flushed and her eyes darting fire at some remark which either had escaped his notice, or in which

he had not discovered, or at least not resented, the latent sting. But we must now return to the day which followed Colonel Leslie's arrival at Grantley, and own that our little heroine, deprived of the society of Walter, and left in what was to her an awful *tête-à-tête* with her father, had some trouble to keep up her spirits; and when the two succeeding days also elapsed without bringing with them any change or variety in the shape of a visit from the inhabitants of Heron Castle, an occurrence on which she confidently reckoned, it was with difficulty that she restrained her impatience.

On the fourth day, having been again disappointed, she determined to order her horse, and late in the afternoon to ride to the vicarage, where Mr. and Mrs. Thornton had returned on the same morning that Walter had left Grantley. That vicarage was as pretty a home as can be well imagined,—one of those low-roofed, strag-



gling cottages, to which a room had been added here and an angle there, till the original shape of the building had merged in these successive additions. Creepers and evergreens, and a gleam of sunshine, made it look as gay on that November afternoon as if spring, instead of winter, had been approaching. A few dahlias and chrysanthemums still adorned the beds, and the hollies were already displaying their coral berries. Margaret's spirits rose as she galloped across the park, and drew near to the iron gate which separated it from the grounds of the vicarage-house. And when she came in sight of the house itself, every small-paned window, every smoking chimney, every laurel bush seemed to give her a welcome. The house-dog barked furiously, the gate swung merrily on its hinges, the door-bell rung gaily as she approached, and she jumped off her pony as lightly as if for three whole days she had not been measuring her words, and glancing

timidly at Colonel Leslie's face, with the secret conviction that he thought her a fool, or a bore. Her grandfather, who from his study had seen her arrive, came hastily to the door, kissed her cold blooming cheeks, called her his darling child, begged her not to stand in the draught, and led her into the little drawing-room, where his wife was employed at an endless piece of tapestry work, which had been as often unpicked as Penelope's, though not on as systematic a plan, or with so deliberate a purpose. Margaret tenderly kissed her grandmother, took the well-known work out of her hands, threw her own hat and whip on a couch, settled herself in a low comfortable arm-chair, threaded a needle, and began working as if for her life.

“Grandpapa!” she exclaimed in a moment, “grandpapa, I know now what the poor dogs feel when their muzzles are taken off.”

“Do you, darling? How so?”

" *I* have been muzzled for the last four days," she returned with a nod and a smile that made her grandfather stoop down and kiss her forehead, while he said :

" Foolish child ! "

" Aye, grandpapa, *you* say ' Foolish child ! ' and it means, ' Dear, clever, darling girl. ' While my father says, when I make a remark, ' Very true, my love, ' and *that* means, ' I wish the girl would hold her tongue. ' So much for the value of *words*."

" Words, my dear," observed Mrs. Thornton, sententiously, " are only the signs of things."

" True, grandmamma, and certain things had better give no signs of life at all ; such as a father's aversion to his child," she added, with a tone of mingled emotion and resentment.

" Nonsense, my love," cried Mr. Thornton, " how could anybody have an aversion to you, and still less your own father ? "

" There is no accounting for aversions, Mr.

Thornton," observed his wife; "I have felt myself the most inexplicable preferences for some people, and dislikes for others. I never could abide the sight of Mary Dickins, Mrs. Sydney's housemaid, or of the young curate who did duty here last Sunday."

"He squints, grandmamma, and Mary Dickins has a crooked mouth and a bottle-nose," cried Margaret, glancing at the opposite looking-glass, which, certainly, reflected an image ill-calculated to inspire aversion.

At that moment the door opened, and two gentlemen came in, the very two for whose appearance Margaret had vainly watched during the last four days. Walter Sydney shook hands with her, and then introduced his companion, young Neville, who, after a slight bow, turned away, and withdrew into a recess behind Mrs. Thornton's embroidery frame. Margaret had been anxious to see Edmund Neville; first, because she had heard

of him all her life; and, secondly, because that wish had been thwarted for three whole days. She was somewhat disappointed at his appearance—people we have heard of and thought of much are seldom like what we have expected to see; and though Walter had told her that his friend was not tall, that he was very slight, and that, with the exception of a pair of handsome dark grey eyes, shaded with black eyebrows and eyelashes, he had not a good feature in his face; she had pictured to herself a very different *heros de roman* from the boy, as she rather contemptuously termed him in her own mind, who was now sitting opposite to her.

In order to explain why he need have been a *heros de roman* at all, we must unveil a little more of that secret web which is woven in a girl's mind during the time when her future destiny is a mystery to her. Margaret, like—not *all*—but *most* girls, from the time that she had ceased to

consider her own marriage as an event that would as naturally and as inevitably occur as having her first gown substituted for a frock, her hair turned up with a comb instead of flowing in ringlets over her neck, or dining at seven with grown-up people instead of at two with her governess, had often revolved in her secret thoughts what was likely to be her destiny in that line. It must be confessed that the idea had often suggested itself to her mind that Mr. Edmund Neville, the friend—almost, like herself, the adopted child of Walter,—the heir to an immense property in Ireland, and, as she had heard, distinguished at Oxford for his remarkable abilities, would be a very desirable husband for the heiress of Grantley Manor. On this notion had been built up many secret imaginings, many vague cogitations respecting his probable merits, his qualities, his looks, and the circumstances that would attend their first meeting. This event had now come to pass, but unattended with

any exciting incidents; and what was still more provoking, she did not herself feel in the least excited; but, turning to Walter, she said in a low voice—

“What an unkind man you are, not to have been to see me for three whole days! Account for yourself, Old Walter, or I shall think you the most capricious and inconsiderate of men.”

She could not repress a smile as she made this accusation; it was so inconsistent with Walter's character, that she fully expected he would regard it as a jest; but strange to say, he looked a little embarrassed at the charge, and said he had intended to come, but had been twice accidentally prevented just as his horse's head was turned towards Grantley.

“Have you been showing Mr. Neville the beauties of the country?” said Margaret, who was curious to hear her new acquaintance speak.

He turned his head suddenly towards her, the

colour rushed into his cheek, the keen glance of his eye rested one instant on her face, and then was rapidly withdrawn. Opening Mrs. Thornton's "Every Lady her Own Knitter," or some such erudite guide to learning, he began reading out to her, in a low voice, directions for the manufacture of a poor man's waistcoat, and then begged to count the stitches in her work, and appeared quite absorbed with this occupation, while Walter was replying to Margaret's question. Not being much accustomed to give up any point, however trifling, on which her mind was set, she cut this answer rather short, and turning to young Neville, asked him what he thought of the scenery of Brace Muir, the object of their excursion on the preceding day. He gave a slight start when she spoke to him, and answered, without raising his eyes from the rows of knitting which he was counting, "It is very wild, very picturesque." Then in a hurried manner he held



out the knitting to Mrs. Thornton, with several stitches in it dropped, and walking up to the flower-stand, he smelt the geraniums and twisted their leaves, with a heightened colour and restless manner.

“It is getting late, my love,” cried Mr. Thornton from the lawn in front of the drawing-room; “your pony is impatient, and you had better be off.”

“We will accompany you,” said Walter, “it will scarcely lengthen our ride, and I should like Neville to see the beeches of Grantley before they have shed all their leafy honours.”

“I must go back straight to Heron Castle,” cried his friend hastily; “I have a letter to write before the post goes out : but I know the way, so do not think of me.”

Margaret was provoked ; it was evident that Walter’s friend was resolved not to make her acquaintance, and bent on avoiding her society.

A slight, almost imperceptible, swelling of heart, accompanied this impression. She was not pained, no indeed; nor mortified either. What was it to her—what did she care whether that ill-mannered boy chose to notice her or not? It was very good-natured of her to have offered to talk to him. She had no wish, now, ever to set her eyes on him again. She was sorry for Walter that his friend was so ungracious and unsatisfactory. She did not wish indeed that Walter had allowed him to be tossed off the battlements of his own castle; but she did wish he had not asked him to Heron Castle to spoil all their comfort. She was just seated in her saddle, and gathering the bridles in her hand, when, turning towards the windows of the dining-room to nod a last adieu to Mrs. Thornton, her eyes met those of Neville, who was standing by her grandmother's side. They were fixed upon her with an intense and piercing earnestness which startled and confused her.

The next moment, long before they had reached the gate of the park, she had made up her mind that Walter had all along had it in his head to bring about a marriage between her and his friend ; that he had probably hinted this to him ; that this had been very foolish of Walter, for it had put a constraint on their first acquaintance, which would however very soon wear off ; and by the time they turned the corner of the avenue, she had begun to examine in her own mind whether Edmund was not rather too short and too slight to be reckoned good-looking ; whether she should, on the whole, like to marry an Irishman ; whether there was any Irish accent in his way of speaking ; and, above all, whether there was likely to be any opportunity of ascertaining this fact. There was no time to be lost in investigating the subject, for with Margaret there was generally little or no interval between the thought in the mind, and the words on the lips.

That interval! How it varies with different people!—How much turns upon it! What a rubicon it is—that second, during which the impetuous impulse of the heart, or the rapid conception of the brain, moulds itself into words, and assumes a living shape!—During which, some can deliberately close “the barriers of their teeth,” as the Eastern proverb has it, and force back the rising flood,—some, into the polluted dens they call their hearts,—some, into the secret shrines where self is sacrificed and God adored!

What a strange power there is in *silence*. How many resolutions are formed; how many sublime conquests effected during that pause, when the lips are closed, and the soul secretly feels the eye of her Maker upon her. When some of those cutting, sharp, blighting words have been spoken which send the hot indignant blood to the face and head, if those to whom they are addressed keep silence, look on with awe, for a mighty work

is going on within them, and the Spirit of Evil, or their Guardian Angel is very near to them in that hour. During that pause they have made a step towards Heaven or towards Hell, and an item has been scored in the book which the day of judgment shall see opened. They are the strong ones of the earth, the mighty for good or for evil, those who know how to keep silence when it is a pain and a grief to them ; those who give *time* to their own soul, to wax strong against temptation ; or to the powers of wrath, to stamp upon her the mark of their withering passage.

Margaret was not, at this time at least, one of these mighty ones, and the thought that crossed her mind seldom failed to pass her lips, especially when Walter was at her side. She had not therefore been many minutes seated in her saddle before, to use a common expression, she took the bull by the horns, or rather the mane of her companion's horse in her hand, and rolling the

rough hair round and round her little finger, she asked—

“How long is Mr. Neville going to stay with you?”

“A few days longer, I believe. How do you like him?”

As she left the Vicarage drawing-room, Margaret would certainly have answered “Not at all,” but there had been something in that earnest gaze which she had detected through the clematis creepers of the dining-room window which disposed her to suspend her unfavourable judgment. She thought it accordingly more prudent not to commit herself, and said with a smile,

“Why, in truth, he seems little inclined to give me an opportunity of judging.”

“I suppose,” said Walter in the same tone, “that he is afraid of you.”

“Afraid of me!” cried Margaret, with a burst of her own merry laugh, “I wish that was true!

I should like to see somebody afraid of *me* ! Why, Walter, I cannot, by dint of frowning and lecturing, make one of the school-children afraid of me. I threatened the other day to turn Martin Dick, the carpenter's fat boy, out of the room, but when he put his thumb to his nose, and spread his fingers out, looking all the time so impudently good-tempered, I laughed outright, and compromised my dignity. What black fingers they were, too !” she added, laughing again at the recollection, while with her own she imitated the attitude of the naughty school-boy, and looked so very pretty, that Walter said, in a half-grumbling tone,

“ Some people might be afraid of you, though Martin Dick is not. Afraid of loving you too much, you little witch ! ”

“ More than I deserve, you mean, Old Walter ? Well ! *you* may be afraid of that ; though I should hope your case was a hopeless one ; but as

to Mr. Neville, *he* can have none of *that* sort of fear."

O Margaret! Margaret! this was the first time in your life that you did not speak the exact truth: for did you not think, even while those words were in your mouth, that just such a fear as that, would make somebody avoid you in a vicarage drawing-room, and peep at you through branches of clematis?—and did you not begin to revolve in secret why Edmund Neville should be afraid of thinking you too pretty, or making friends with you, when the very worst that could happen to him, would be to fall in love with one of the most captivating heiresses that ever mounted a little spirited Arabian;—and who now, as the wind blew about the brown curls that escaped from under her hat, bent her head low to avoid the spreading arms of the old oaks through which she winded her way; and as she darted out of the grove into the open plain, drew herself



up, and shook back those troublesome curls, and reined in her horse, till he arched his neck, and shook back his mane too, and bounded along, as if the hope of conquest, and the pride of beauty, and the schemes of youth, and the visions of joy, and the magic scenes which fancy draws on the blank pages of futurity, were stirring at *his* heart, and flushing before *his* eyes, as well as in those of his mistress ?

Ride on Margaret ! Ride on while you may, with that bright colour in your cheek, with that smile in your eyes, with that joy at your heart. The blue sky is over your head, and the smooth green turf beneath your feet, and the Spirit of Hope within you is undimmed and strong. Ride on ! with Old Walter at your side, and his voice of kindness in your ear ; for the tried affection of early days is a holy thing, and the heart that has loved you in childhood, and the eyes that have gazed on you in infancy, are loving you,

and watching over you still. Ride on ! and while you urge to his full speed your bounding favourite, and turn your glowing cheek to catch the cold breeze that sweeps across the plain, fear not for the morrow ; for the child lies down to sleep by the side of the precipice, and the sea-bird folds his wing on the crest of the wave, and the butterfly dances forth in the sunny days of the spring, and *fear* was not made for the young, for the strong, for the beautiful. Alas ! for those who watch ! Alas ! for those who *fear* ! The child wakes, and the chasm is deep ! The sea-bird's pinions are weak, and the hurricane is strong ! The sunny days of spring wax stormy, and the spring of life is often darkened ! Ride on Margaret, ride on while the wintry wind brings colour to your cheek, health to your frame, and joy to your heart !

## CHAPTER IV.

As Walter was galloping by Margaret's side along the road which followed the sinuosities of the terrace that overhung the park, the loud report of the keeper's gun which he was discharging in the court behind the house, startled his horse, who, suddenly veering on one side, placed his foot on a loose brick at the foot of the wall, stumbled and fell. For an instant Walter's foot was entangled in the stirrup, and for an instant bore the whole weight of the prostrate animal. When he extricated himself, he became immediately conscious of a severe sprain, and it was only by the assistance of a servant who had hurried down from the house at the sight of the accident that he was enabled to reach the hall door, when

he nearly fainted from the intensity of the pain. He was immediately conveyed to his *own* apartment, as a bow-windowed cheerful bed-room, and little adjoining sitting-room, had been for many years always considered; and Margaret, after seeing him laid on a couch, and having summoned Mrs. Ramsay, the housekeeper, to administer such remedies as her skill could suggest, proceeded to her father's library in order to acquaint him with the accident. She knocked at the door, and receiving no answer after two or three attempts, opened it gently. Colonel Leslie was sitting by the fire, with his face buried in his hands, and Margaret doubted whether he was asleep or deep in thought. It is awkward to wake a person suddenly either from sleep or from abstraction, and she fidgetted about till her father suddenly turned round, and with a loud "Who is there?" in her turn startled her. With a trembling voice she related Walter's accident, and as Colonel

Leslie looked at her pale cheek and anxious countenance, his own softened, and passing his arm kindly round her waist, he told her to show him the way to Walter's room. When they reached it, Mrs. Ramsay's fomentations had begun to take effect, at least it may be supposed so, for Walter received them with a smile, and an assurance that though he could not walk, he did not suffer much. At the same time there was a slight contraction in his forehead, and a nervous movement in his hands that invalidated the truth of the assertion ; but Margaret was satisfied with the assurance. Young people (Heaven bless them) are easily comforted, and they jump at anything which relieves them from the irksome necessity of being sorry.

“ And if dear Walter's pain will but go,” she exclaimed, as she bent over him, and tapped his pillow-cushion to make it comfortable, and threw a pink *barége* shawl over his feet, “ it will not be

at all unpleasant to have him for once tied by the leg, literally tied by the leg. Yes, yes, you volatile Old Walter, we have clipped your wings, and now you must stay, '*nolens volens*,' as you used to say. You see I have not forgotten all my Latin."

"Well, if you have not forgotten your English either, I shall get you to write a note to my mother, as you and Leslie seem to think I cannot go home at present."

"Of course not," cried Colonel Leslie; "and, by the way, as that young Neville, who is on a visit to you, is the son of an old friend of mine, and would be no doubt in your father's way during your absence, ask him to come here. He can have plenty of shooting, and hunting too, if he likes it, and I dare say Margaret can amuse him in the evenings."

"Thank you," said Walter, "if it is not inconvenient to you, I should like it."

“Write to Mrs. Sydney, Margaret, and send a groom with the note. He must also call at Dr. Bartlet’s on his way. Walter should see him to-night, for I can observe by that restless twitching in the leg that he is still suffering.”

Margaret went to the library to write her note. She thought it rather an important one. First, it was necessary to let Mrs. Sydney know of Walter’s accident without frightening her; then there was the message about Mr. Neville; very likely he would see this note—and people are very apt to form their judgments of others from their notes. She would herself feel rather curious to read a note written by Edmund Neville, to see what kind of hand he wrote, and he might just feel the same curiosity about hers. Indeed, had he not been a curious person, he would not have gazed so earnestly on her from behind those clematis branches. In the silver inkstand in the library, there were three pens that had been used before,

two black smeared, and one white one. Margaret chose the last. There is a peculiar way in which people set about writing one of these important notes—a note that sets you thinking of the moment when it will be received, and the person who will read it. Generally, like Margaret, they select a new pen; they take just ink enough and not too much, for fear any word should be illegible; a fear that never seems to occur to them in ordinary cases (what a blessing for their correspondents if it did); and then they so carefully weigh the difference between two nearly synonymous words, and it becomes a matter of consequence whether they are their correspondents “very truly,” or “very sincerely;” or whether they shall begin with a familiar “Dear,” or an impressive “My dear.” Then the direction never seems clear or distinct enough; and those long-tried and well-trusted means of conveyance, letter-bags or letter-boxes, mail-coaches or mail-trains,



all at once assume an awful character of insecurity, and no sort of confidence is felt that they will perform their part in that particular instance. Margaret, however, had a simpler process to depend upon for the transmission of her letter than the complicated machinery of the post-office, and having at length satisfied herself as to its composition, she consigned it to the hands of the butler, with an urgent order that a groom should take it instantly to Heron Castle, and wait for an answer, not forgetting to call at Dr. Bartlet's on his way ; and then she went up to her own room to meditate a little on the occurrences of the day, and on their probable consequences.

Most people feel the charm or the comfort of *their own room*,—but a young girl's is different from any one else's own room. As we advance in life we close the door behind us to be quiet, to shut out, for a while, the world and its cares ; sometimes to muse with grateful hearts on mercies

received, or dangers escaped; sometimes to evoke in silence the ghosts of past blessings, and the memories of happier days—if unhappy, on our knees to gain peace, or in dull abstraction find repose—if happy, either to thank God calmly, and set about our daily work cheerfully; or may be, like the rich man in the parable, to bid our souls be at ease, for much good is laid up in store for us; to dwell on the realities of life, to gather strength or apathy against the day of trial, to feel, indeed, sorrow and gladness by turns, for we grieve and we rejoice to the end—but the one has grown calm, and the other hard—the blossom has faded, and what remains?—a withered husk, or a glorious fruit! But when a young girl enters her own room, and shuts the door behind her, it is the dull realities of life she excludes, and a world of enchantment that she enters—whether with her eyes on the ground, or unconsciously fixed on the broad landscape; the single tree, or the slated

roof, which her window-frame spans ; or else, while with hurried footsteps she paces up and down the narrow space before her, she acts in spirit, she rehearses in thought, she paints in fancy, the scenes which the veil of futurity still hides from her sight, with a vivid interest and a strength of emotion which life itself seldom yields, and the childish secrets of her solitude are to her the most exciting and the busiest portion of existence. Very busy was Margaret in that line ; and while her maid placed one camellia in her hair, and then another, she thought till her head almost ached of the probable consequences of the invitation that had just been despatched.

Luckily for her Mrs. Dalton walked in just then with a nosegay of hot-house flowers, provided every day for her by the old gardener ; and still more luckily, after expatiating a little on Walter's accident, she asked the very question Margaret wished to be asked. Rare luck for Mrs. Dalton, whose questions were not often so acceptable !

“Well, my dear, have you seen young Mr. Neville?”

“Yes! Have you, Mrs. Dalton?”

“Indeed I have, my dear; and had some conversation with him too.”

“Where? When? How could you have met him?”

“Why, the fact is, my dear, I wanted a *Colchicum Autumnale* to complete the collection of *Melanthaceæ* which Miss Flummer describes in the fifth chapter of her little work, ‘*Botany made easy*.’ It is six weeks since we read that chapter together, dear: you know you do not take much to botany, but yet I never saw you so pleased before with any work upon it, as with those first chapters of ‘*Botany made easy*.’”

Here Margaret gave a sudden jerk, which was not calculated to make her maid consider her task as “*Hair-dressing made easy*.”

“Yes, yes, it is a very nice little book, but did you find—”

“Yes, my dear, a very fine specimen, indeed; but not exactly the same as Miss Flummer—”

“O, do leave Miss Flummer alone; I hate the very sound of her name. Was it in the garden you met?”

“No, dear, in the churchyard; it grows under the old elm.”

“O, the plant, yes! but I meant Mr. Neville.”

“I beg your pardon, my dear. Yes it was in the churchyard I saw him.”

“What could he be doing there?”

“He was looking at the inscriptions on some of the tombs. Just as I passed him, my tin box fell out of my hand; he very civilly picked it up, and, as I was thanking him, he asked me to point out to him the monuments of the Leslie family, and as I showed him where they stood, he inquired if I was a member of your family; and on hearing I was, or rather had been, your governess—”

“Never mind, dear Dally,” interrupted Mar-

garet, laying her hand on the old lady's arm, "you never governed at all, so you shall be called governess as long as you please, even when I am a very old maid; but go on; never mind the dressing-bell, you need not make yourself smart. So Mr. Neville found out you were my governess! And how did you find out who *he* was?"

"As I left the lodge, I had seen him ride along the fish-pond, and old James told me he was the youngster, as he called him, that was staying at Heron Castle."

"Now, tell me; what did he ask about *me*?"

"How old you were."

"Humph! What was that to him, I wonder! And what else?"

"He said, 'Was it not true that Miss Leslie had a charming disposition?'"

"Now, I should like to know what you said in answer to *that*, Mrs. Dalton. Take care; you told

me two days ago that I was the idlest, the vainest, and the most provoking young lady you had ever met with: yes, worse a great deal than Mrs. Atkin's seven daughters, or Sir Charles Butcher's nine—so now I hope you did not go and humbug poor Mr. Neville about me.”

“I said, Miss Margaret, that I was not in the habit of talking over the characters of my pupils, with strangers especially; this I said with a bow and a smile, so as to show the young gentleman I was not offended, and on other subjects had no objection to talk to him.”

“Well done, Dally! No doubt he supposes I am a little vixen, of whom you can say no good, and therefore that in charity you hold your tongue about me. How ill-natured of you not to say that I was a little angel. It is what everybody expects of their governess, though they may have been little devils all their lives. I wish anybody would only ask me what sort of governess you

were. I should look mysterious, and sigh, and refuse to speak, as if you had bullied me within an inch of my life for the last fifteen years."

"For shame, Miss Leslie," said Dally, trying to look grave, but giving, in spite of herself, a grim smile.

"And now," cried Margaret, forcibly detaining the retiring Mrs. Dalton, "and now, what else did you talk about?"

"The country, and the garden, and the neighbours, and Mr. Walter Sydney."

"O, he spoke of Walter, did he? As he ought, I hope?"

"He said he loved him as if he did not fear him, and feared him as if he did not love him."

"Did he really? How very well expressed; but it was odd to say that to you, a perfect stranger."

"Not quite a stranger."

"Why? How? What do you mean?"



"The dinner-bell!" cried the horrified Mrs. Dalton, as the vision of keeping the Colonel waiting presented itself to her affrighted eyes, while the gong resounded in her ears.

"O never mind," cried Margaret, answering the thought, not the words. "Put on the lavender cap and the lace tippet, and you will be ready in a minute; but Dally, mind," she continued, following Mrs. Dalton down the passage, "that you make haste at dessert with those eternal chesnuts you are so fond of, for I shall nod and come away *very* soon. I am so very curious."

Colonel Leslie was that day more conversible than usual at dinner, and while he was giving an animated account of some incidents in the Peninsular War, Margaret forgot her impatience to leave the dining-room, and her eyes flashed with such excitement, that her father said, with a smile, "I believe you would like to lead a forlorn hope yourself, you look so very heroic at this moment."

As I once said before, Colonel Leslie's smiles were sneers, and the sudden way in which he had checked her enthusiasm struck coldly on his daughter's heart. She bit her lips, looked attentively at the birds on her Dresden china plate, and after a pause Mrs. Dalton and herself hurried to the drawing-room. Margaret stood before the blazing fire, and twisting an allumette in her hand, said, aloud, but to herself, "O no, I could not lead a forlorn hope!"

"The Colonel did not really mean you could, my dear," observed Mrs. Dalton.

"I cannot understand the courage of despair. I could do great things if I had strong hopes of success; but forlorn hopes, desperate struggles—O no, it tires me to think of them."

"Then don't think of them, dear child. Won't you have some coffee?"

"Could *you* lead a forlorn hope, Dally?"

"I hope I could."

“What *can* make you feel as if *you* could, when I feel *I* could not?”

“Why, you know, if I were a soldier, it *might* be my duty.”

“What a cold word *duty* is. I could not do right things merely because it were my duty.”

“That is, perhaps, the reason, my dear, why you seldom do right things.”

“Perhaps it is,” said Margaret, slowly, “I know it would be right to try, but it is *such* a forlorn hope,” she added, half sadly, half gaily.

“What do you mean, my dear?”

“To make my father love me,” was the answer.

This was a theme on which Mrs. Dalton never suffered Margaret to proceed. She had that intimate persuasion that what *ought* to be, should never be supposed *not* to be, that the most distant admission of the sort, seemed, in her eyes, almost as shocking as the fact itself, and she desired Margaret, in a much more authoritative

manner than usual, not to talk such wicked nonsense. At this opportune moment the door opened, and a servant brought a note which Margaret took with great eagerness, and which seemed to turn her thoughts into quite another channel, for she had scarcely read it when she exclaimed—

“ Oh ! by the way, how came Mr. Neville not to be altogether a stranger to you ? ”

“ Don’t you know, my dear, that I lived some years in Mr. Warren’s family. Mrs. Warren was young Mr. Neville’s aunt, and when he was a very little boy he was once for some weeks entrusted to my care. I reminded him of this, and he perfectly recollected it, and named several little incidents that had occurred during that visit.”

“ Was he a nice little boy ? ”

“ Very spoilt, indeed, he was, and so wilful. He led one a weary life ! ”

Margaret laughed and said,  
“He is coming here to-morrow. I hope he will not torment us much.”

“O, not now, Miss Margaret, he is too old for that.”

“Well, we shall see,” cried Margaret, springing from her chair, with a bound that carried her in one second to the door, “perhaps people are never too old for that ;” and as she rushed up the stairs to the landing-place, and then down those which led to Walter’s room, jumping two at a time, and singing out in different keys and with various roulades, these words :—“Two can play at that game,”—what was she thinking of? Of the dexterous activity with which she cleared those intervening steps? Of the cup and ball which she snatched up from the table, and managed with the most graceful skill? Or of the shuttlecock which by one little mischievous knock she sent flying across the lofty hall? No; I am

afraid it meant, "If he means to plague me, I may perhaps plague him first!" For shame, Margaret! you did not deserve as you entered Walter's room, and asked him kindly how he did, and fetched a cushion for his head, and sat down by the side of his couch to read to him his mother's note, that he should take your hand and kiss it, and that he should call you the very best little woman in the whole world. You were not a bad one; no, perhaps a tolerably good one, as women go; but certainly not the very best, or anything like it. If he had said the very prettiest we might have let it pass.

The next day it was ascertained that Walter had sprained his leg so severely that it would be quite impossible for him to put his foot to the ground for a week or ten days, at least, and Dr. Bartlet recommended that even then he should not attempt much exertion, but suffer himself to be nursed and treated as an invalid

for some time to come. Margaret heard this decision with considerable satisfaction, and spent an hour in pulling about the furniture in his room, and bringing within his reach everything he could possibly want during what she called his imprisonment.

“Hard labour,” she said, “in the House of Correction; which means, dear Walter, that you are to labour hard for a month to correct my faults.”

“You must confess them before I can correct them,” answered Walter, with a smile. Margaret looked a *little* graver than usual, and folded her arms, as she stood at the end of the couch exactly opposite to Walter.”

“I could not bear you to think ill of me,” she said at last; and after a pause added, with a forced laugh, “and shall not, therefore, choose you for my confessor.”

An hour afterwards, after entangling further some very entangled knitting, with a desperate

pull, which served to bring matters to a crisis, she asked—

“Walter, do you think it a great fault to wish *passionately* to be liked, praised, and loved?”

“No ; not a great fault in itself, but a dangerous taste, and if it grows into a passion, not seldom a fatal one.”

After a pause, seeing that she remained silent, he continued—

“But is it *all* praise you care about? Is it the affection of anyone or everyone that you covet?”

“Not alike,” she replied ; “but none comes amiss. I like the house-dog to wag his tail at my approach. Cousin Mary’s baby to throw his arms round my neck when I kiss him. I like kind, loving faces about me ; and I hate a cold, stern look, as I do a dark and gloomy day. I wish to be loved, as I wish the sun to shine upon me. As a sunless world, so would a loveless life be to



me! Walter, can you fancy a more unhappy being than one whom nobody loved?"

"Yes; one who loved no one."

"Would that be worse, do you think? Can love be its own reward?"

Walter opened a volume that was lying by his side, and read out loud the following beautiful passage from one of Scott's novels:—

"Her thoughts were detached from the world, and only visited it, with an interest like that which guardian-spirits take for their charge, in behalf of those with whom she lived in love, or of the poor whom she could serve and comfort—"

"That is like *you*," said Margaret, as he closed the book; "and that is the sort of love you would feel for others. I shall never be so unselfish."

At that moment her eyes were fixed on the window, and a smile hovered on her lips as the sound of horses' feet on the pavement of the inner court announced an arrival. She rose hastily, but

before she had made her escape through one door the other was flung open, and Edmund Neville made his appearance. Without being really handsome, he had some of the picturesque qualities of beauty. The deep colour in his cheek, and the earnest expression of his eyes, as he advanced towards Walter, and anxiously inquired if he was still suffering from his accident, gave him favour in Margaret's eyes. He turned quickly towards her, and held out his hand as to an old acquaintance; his manner quite changed from that of the day before. When she moved to go away, he took her by surprise, by saying, with a kind of childish but arbitrary earnestness, "Don't go away."

Now, considering that she had not the least wish to go, it would have been ill-natured not to stay; and with a smile that said as much, she took a middle course, neither leaving the room, nor returning to her chair by the fire; but half

leaning, half sitting, on the back of Walter's couch, she set about rubbing, with the corner of her embroidered pocket-handkerchief, a certain ink spot which disfigured the brightest pcony on the chintz cover of the said sofa. That this notable employment could not come to a natural end (seeing that no rubbing has ever been known to take out ink-spots), was rather an advantage than not, under the circumstances ; and it was not till the luncheon-bell rang, and Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, who were always invited to come to Grantley when any stranger was there, had made their appearance in the dining-room, that Margaret, for the third time, advanced towards the door, and this time was not checked in her progress, but glided down the oak-staircase with Edmund Neville by her side. Mr. Thornton, who was already seated before an immense game-pie, and with the wing of a partridge on his uplifted fork, and a broad smile on his

radiant countenance, exclaimed, as she entered the room—

“How now, my darling; what makes you look so very bright to-day? Muzzle off, eh?”

She made a sign with her pretty head as if slipping it out of a collar, and drawing down the suspended pinion to her own plate with a little gentle violence, she laughed gaily at her own exploit; boasted of having her own way in everything, and managing everybody by hook or by crook; and lastly, in an under-tone, with a significant little nod, she said to Mrs. Dalton,

“And after all, Dally, I think I could lead a forlorn hope.”

Three weeks had elapsed since Walter's accident, and to Margaret they had been some of the pleasantest she had ever known. She lived in a moral atmosphere, which to her was both natural and genial—that of praise and affection. Her grandfather and grandmother, and Mr. and Mrs.

Sydney, who had come to Grantley to be near their son, all idolised her. She had grown up among them—under their eyes—on their knees. Her voice—her laugh—had been the sunshine of their lives for the last seventeen years. *Margaret's room*, whether it were the tapestried bed-chamber at Heron Castle, where Walter had so often lifted her up as a baby, to look at the strange figures on the wall; where he had told her stories about the fierce Count Bertram and the gentle Lady Godiva; where she had shook her little fists at Queen Eleanor, the cruel dame in the red hood, and cried for fair Rosamond, the damsel in the green mantle; or whether it was the chintz bed-room at the Parsonage, whose sash-window opened on the smoothest lawn and the gaudiest flower-beds that ever adorned one of those pretty English homes—*Margaret's room* was *the* room in the house.

“My singing-bird is gone, Walter,” Mrs. Sydney was wont to say to her son; “but I like

to look at the empty cage, and think she will come back to it." Her pale, quiet Walter pressed her hand upon this; but latterly he had often replied, "You know, dearest mother, we cannot now hope to keep her often to ourselves." And then his fond, unwise, foolish mother would answer, "And why should we not keep her, some day, all to ourselves?" The colour would deepen on Walter's sallow cheek; and he would frown when his mother said this, but he did not, I fancy, love her the less for it.

When Margaret left the Parsonage, Mr. Thornton repeated, ten times a day, "What a plague it is that the child must go! What nonsense it is that she must go home at all!" And though Mrs. Thornton repeatedly assured him that it was not in the nature of things that people should always stay in the same place, and that she would rather see Margaret dead at her feet and buried in the churchyard than shut up for life

in a poky house like their's; or, at other times, ask with a mild significant placidity, "What's the girl to us, or we to the girl, that she should never leave us?"—still she, too, pined for the return of the "bonny lass," (as the old Scotch gardener called her), and twenty times a day she looked up from her work (that everlasting white cat on a blue ground) to see whether the green gate was not swinging on its hinges to admit the old black pony, who had, for so many years, carried the little lady of the manor through the copse woods, the shady avenues, and the grassy glades of the fair valley of Grantley. All went well with Margaret during that dull month of November. Everybody smiled on her, and every eye that rested upon her gladdened as it gazed. Walter, her "dear Old Walter," she was sure must be very happy in his own favourite room, with his gentle mother to nurse him, and her, his

own little Margaret, to read to him, to sing to him, to fetch for him from the library those heavy dull wise books he was so fond of, and to carry his messages about the country, and convey to many a cottage, and many a sick-bed, the comforts he was wont to bestow day by day on those who stood in need of them. Whether the bright vision that passed before these sufferers' eyes, even though it left behind it substantial tokens of its presence, soothed their sorrows as much as the kind pressure of Walter's hand and the whispered words of support and of hope beyond what this world can give, that they were wont to receive from him, is doubtful; but she did her best, that fair and happy child of prosperity, and it was not her fault if a bitter experience had not yet taught her those secrets of the heart by which we find our way to the hearts of others. Yea, and the poor blessed her,



and Walter praised her, and his mother worshipped her, and all spoiled her. Was that not enough to make her happy? Was it strange that her eyes grew brighter every day, her step lighter, and her laugh more joyous than ever?

## CHAPTER V.

ONE morning that Margaret was at work in the drawing-room, and Mrs. Thornton was sorting worsteds at her side, Edmund Neville, whose eyes had been fixed upon some shades of grey as intently as if he, too, was about to shade the tail of a white cat, suddenly jumped up, and now rivetted his eyes on the entrance court, where Colonel Leslie was about to mount his horse.

“Where is your father going so early?” he asked of Margaret.

“To Lord Donnington’s,” she replied; “his place is fifteen miles off.”

Having lost sight of Colonel Leslie, who at a rapid pace had galloped down the avenue, Edmund now turned again to Margaret, and

with a manner that was peculiar to himself, and which was at once as coaxing as a child's, and as despotic as a young autocrat's, said, looking earnestly into her face—

“I want to see the house. Come and show me *all* the house.”

“The kitchen and the cellars, I suppose?” asked Margaret, with a smile; “for you have seen all the rest.”

“No, indeed, I have not examined the pictures in the dining-room; and I have never been into the inner library, nor into your father's study. Come with me.”

“What an odd fancy,” persisted Margaret.

“Not at all an odd fancy, my love,” observed Mrs. Thornton; and, phrenologically speaking, I can perfectly account for it.”

Margaret who knew that her grandmother had been studying Combe during the last two days, instinctively wished to escape the threatened

solution, and another impatient "Come" from Edmund was more effectual than the last, and both had reached the bottom of the stairs before Mrs. Thornton had recollected the exact phrenological bump by which she had intended to account for Mr. Neville's wish to see the house.

To describe Edmund Neville (not phrenologically, but in common plain language) is what must now be attempted, although it is a matter of some difficulty to find the exact terms in which to do so. He was rather short and very slight, but yet his muscular and perfectly symmetrical figure conveyed a notion of remarkable activity and strength. His head was small and particularly well set on his shoulders; there was that singularly grave and refined manliness about his attitudes which brings to mind the portraits of Vandyke. His hair was very dark but not black, and his complexion at once pale and healthy. His eyes were very fine, but it would not have been easy to

define their expression ; eagerness was their chief characteristic, and this peculiarity contrasted strangely with the general languor and carelessness of his manner. His eyes were fine, they seemed to read into your soul, but they did not allow you to read into his. His manner combined a winning childlike ease with a more than ordinary self-possession. His lips were thin, and the lines round his well-formed mouth indicated a fixity of purpose, scarcely consisting with the apparent indolence of his character. It was like his hand which, soft and white as it was, had the strength of a steel spring, and could break at once a bough which Colonel Leslie and Mr. Thornton had vainly attempted to bend. In the smallest occurrences of life he practised a strength of volition which it was very difficult to withstand. He obliged Mrs. Thornton to ground her cat in red instead of blue, Mrs. Dalton to give the village children an extra holiday, Margaret to

wear heath instead of ivy in her hair, Walter to read out loud a pamphlet on the Corn-laws instead of an essay on Ecclesiology, and he was even known to carry a point with old Mr. Sydney about his plantation : a certain bank was planted with beeches instead of firs at his suggestion, although in the first instance the lord of Heron Castle had treated the proposal with unqualified contempt. There was something nearly irresistible in the childlike earnestness with which he pursued his object ; there was something so *caressant* (no English word will do here) in his way of urging it : if the subject was a trifle it seemed so ill-natured to oppose him ; if it was of consequence his whole heart seemed so set upon it ; and thus he made his way, and had his way with every one, and every one liked him even better than they owned ; and though Colonel Leslie sneered at the way in which others spoiled “ that young Neville,” he too was always glad to see him, would turn

out of his way to join him in his walks, and he put off a party which had long been projected to St. Wulstan's Abbey, because Edmund, poor fellow, had a head-ache and could not go with them.

Margaret and Edmund were now examining the pictures in the dining-room with an interest that seemed equal on both sides, for she loved them almost as the companions of her childhood, as the subjects of her day-dreams in later years, as the familiar images which had wound themselves into all the memories of the past. He seemed to enjoy them as one who could appreciate their merit as an artist, and he listened with interest to the family histories that were attached to some of them. They stopped some time before a portrait of Colonel Leslie which had been painted for Margaret's mother, just before her marriage. It seemed to rivet Edmund's attention; he gazed on it as if his eyes would never take themselves off

it; Margaret spoke to him twice without rousing him, and when for the third time she asked him if he thought it like, he slowly answered "Very like" and still gazed on with undiminished attention. At last he turned away and said abruptly,

"How old is your father?"

"About forty-two, I believe," she replied.

"And you?" said Edmund, with a smile.

"Not *very* far from nineteen," she answered.

"And your sister?" he continued.

Margaret started; turned her large violet-coloured eyes full upon him, with a troubled and enquiring expression. It had been a dream of her childhood that she had a sister; she had a vague recollection of having once heard her grandmother say to her governess, when they thought her out of hearing, "Only think of that little Italian papist being *her* sister!" With that strange reserve which exists so often even in the most open-hearted and guileless children, she had kept



this in her mind, and pondered over it, without ever speaking about it to any one, till by degrees the impression faded away, and was lost among the busy thoughts of daily life. As time went on, it seemed so unnatural that if she indeed had a sister, no one should name or allude to her, that she came to reckon this remembrance among the wild fancies which in hours of solitude so often take a form in the musings of childhood. Edmund's question seemed, as by an electric shock, to wake a train of thought in her mind, and her heart beat very fast as she answered,

"Years ago I once imagined that I had a sister somewhere abroad, but as no one ever mentioned her to me, I have ceased to think it possible. What then do you know of any sister of mine?"

"I was told you had one," he carelessly replied; "but I dare say I make some mistake; now show me the copy of Guido's *Speranza*, which you spoke of the other day."

Margaret opened the door of Colonel Leslie's study, and led the way to the picture, but her heart was full; and turning suddenly back, she said to Edmund in an earnest manner,

“Will you please to tell me, Mr. Neville, when and where you heard that I had a sister? It would be such—”

She stopped short, and turned abruptly aside.

“Such what?” cried Edmund eagerly.

“Such happiness!” she exclaimed, with a passionate burst of tears. “I want a sister;” she continued, with great excitement. “They are all so good, so kind, so wise, those who love me, those I love; and Walter—dear Walter—I love him with all my heart; but they are too good, too wise, too patient with me. I want a sister to talk to, to laugh with, to quarrel with”—and she smiled through her tears.

Edmund seized her hand, and kissed it.

“Margaret! dear Margaret!” he began, “I

have something to say to you ;—something which day after day I have been longing to say to you. Will you listen to me now ? Will you hear me, dearest Margaret ? ”

“ No, no ! ” cried Margaret, starting up from her chair, while a crimson blush spread over her brow, her cheeks, her neck. “ I never intended this—you have quite misunderstood me—I never meant—”

At that moment the house-door bell rang furiously ; an instant afterwards, Colonel Leslie’s step was heard on the stairs, and before the doors of the study were flung open, Margaret had disappeared through the garden entrance.

Edmund, with the most perfect self-possession, apologised for having invaded the study, and in the most leisurely manner returned to the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Thornton’s attention divided between the shading of pussy’s tail, and explaining to Mr. Sydney the absolute necessity

of investigating the bumps of children at the earliest period of their existence. Indeed, her feelings on the subject were so strong, that were she to have another child, she had much rather it was born without a head at all, than deprived of certain bumps which she deemed it incumbent on babies to possess.

We must follow Margaret to her own room, where she had rushed with the consciousness that something important had taken place, but without a clear idea of what had occurred during the last few minutes. Her hands were joined together and her head rested upon them. She thought of the first earnest gaze of those piercing eyes which had since been so often fixed upon her's with an expression of intense interest, which haunted her by day and by night. She thought of the childish pleasure with which she had looked to Edmund's visit—of the childish exultation with which she had seen him follow her, seek her, watch her ;

and now something serious had come over the spirit of this dream. It seemed as if a spring had been touched which opened to her a new world. Was it the world of fancy or the world of realities that she was now entering upon? Had she been dreaming hitherto, and was she now awaking, or was it a new and strange dream that was taking possession of her?

She felt afraid—it was only a little nervousness—she lifted up her head, and turned her flushed cheek towards the window. She looked on the lovely landscape below, the broad glad river, and the purple hills beyond; a little bird was fluttering wildly near the window. It seemed stunned at last, and lying on its back, gazed upward in silent terror. A hawk was hovering over it. Margaret watched it with intense interest, and when the bird of prey pounced on its victim, she gave a slight scream and shut her eyes. When she opened them again, two or three bright

feathers, stained with blood, were lying on the gravel walk.

“Poor bird, poor little bird!” she said in a low tone, and her voice trembled.

“What nonsense is this? What is the matter with me?” she impatiently exclaimed, after a moment’s interval, and drawing a deep breath, she shook off that strange oppression. A wild fit of gaiety succeeded it. She sat down at the piano-forte, and her fingers ran over the keys with triumphant rapidity. She threw open the window, and snatching a branch of laurel from the tree beneath it, she threw the shining leaves into the fire, and smiled to herself as the bright flame rose and the sound of a mimic artillery burst from them, such as had often amused her childhood. She moved from chair to chair, from window to window, opened every book on the table, and then threw herself into her low arm-chair before the fire, and gave herself up to

a fit of musing, in which was acted and re-acted in fancy the short but important scene which had occurred in the study. Her cheeks again turned crimson as she thought that by her own unguarded expressions she had perhaps drawn from Edmund Neville an avowal of his feelings ; she had checked that avowal in time to save her own self-respect, but would he ever ask her again to listen to him ; or would he take her at her word, and *never* woo her more ? O no, her eyes,—and she looked up in the glass at those large dark mischievous blue eyes,—would soon bring him back to her feet ; and she glanced at the fender on which the smallest feet in the world were resting ; and the smile which played on her lips and which dimpled on her cheek would have been enough to bring back the most restive admirer from one end of the world to the other. “ And luckily,” thought Margaret, and the smile turned into a laugh, “ he is not yet at the other end of the world, and if he

ever gets there, or away from Grantley, without asking to be heard again, my name is not Margaret Leslie, and I am not my father's daughter." And the spoilt little beauty left her room with as determined a step and resolute a countenance as if about to scale the walls of Badajos or the ramparts of Burgos.

When Margaret entered the drawing-room, she found that Walter, for the first time, with the aid of a stick, had managed to reach it, and was established in a recess between the window and one of the huge fire-places of that old-fashioned apartment. She held out her hand to him and said gaily:—

"You must not get *too* active, Walter. I am half angry at seeing you out of your room. You will be taking flight to Heron Castle if we do not take care."

Walter kindly pressed her offered hand, but did not reply in the same gay tone as herself.



He asked if she had seen her father since his return.

“No,” said Margaret, and at that moment she remembered that instead of spending the whole day out as he had intended, Colonel Leslie had come home after an hour’s absence.

“Do you know why he did not go to Lord Donnington’s?” she asked.

“I fancy he met the postman between this and Herrington, and that taking his letters from him he found one that made him turn back. At least he said something to that effect as he crossed the hall to his study.”

The mention of the study recalled to Margaret’s mind the whole train of thought which had previously occupied her, and when an instant afterwards Walter put to her the same question he had done once before, three weeks ago, and in much the same tone and manner asked, “How do you like Edmund Neville?” it seemed as if

he had read into her thoughts. She gave a slight start, and would have given anything to keep down the colour that she felt fast rising into her cheeks ; but as that was impossible, she turned away and stood with her back to Walter, while she answered in a hurried manner.

“ I like him very much. Don’t you ? ”

Walter did not answer.

“ Don’t you ? ” repeated Margaret, and this time she looked him full in the face.

“ No ; ” was after a pause of a few seconds, his deliberate answer.

“ No ! And why not ? ” exclaimed Margaret, in a tone of so much disappointment, that it could not fail to excite his observation. A cloud passed over his face, and he was again silent. Margaret impatiently repeated her question ; but she, in her turn, was struck with the suffering expression of his countenance, and sitting down gently by his side, she took his hand in her’s, and in quite another tone, for the third time, asked—

“And why do you not like Edmund Neville?”

“Perhaps I am unjust,” Walter said with an effort. “I may wrong him, but I cannot feel any confidence in him. I do not feel as if the truth was in him.”

“Has he ever deceived you? Has he told you what was not true?”

“No; I cannot say he has; but he has none of that value for truth, that deep respect for it, which he must have in whose character I could place implicit confidence.”

“This is a very vague charge,” returned Margaret, in a tone of annoyance, “and hardly consistent with that charity which thinketh no evil, and which you are always inculcating upon me.”

Walter coloured deeply, and leant his head on his hand, while she continued—

“You, who were once so fond of Edmund! You, who considered him, as you often told me, almost as your son! It must be some very strong

proof of his unworthiness that can induce you to set his friends against him."

"His friends!" said Walter, with emotion. "Is friendship then the growth of three weeks standing? Are you the friend of a man whom three weeks ago you had never seen?"

"I made acquaintance with him under a false impression! I fancied he had been *your* friend; I am now undeceived; but I cannot follow you in your rapid changes of opinion, especially when you cannot account for them."

"You are severe, Margaret, but perhaps just. God forgive me if I have wronged Edmund; if I have misjudged him! I spoke hastily, and—but what do I see?—tears in your eyes, my child? Speak to me, dearest. Do not turn away from me.—I can bear anything but that. Tell me, Margaret, and forgive me for asking the question—as an old friend—almost a father—"

"Oh! if you were my father," she exclaimed,

clasping her hands together, "I would open my whole heart to you!"

"Do so now, Margaret. You will never repent of it. Trust to the assurance of one who has never deceived you, my dear child. Eighteen years ago, I stood by your cradle by the side of your mother, and loved you *then* for that mother's sake. Can you not now trust me with your little secrets—your little sorrows, if you have any."

"Sorrows, Walter?—Secrets?"

"Yes, a secret, perhaps; but hardly a sorrow, at least ten minutes ago it was not a sorrow."

She sat down at the pianoforte, first played the notes, and then, in a low voice, sang the words of a little French song, which ended thus—

"Mon secret, mon secret, mon bonheur,  
Il est là, il est là, dans mon cœur!"

She fixed her eyes on Walter as she finished her song, and their expression reminded him of those eyes which, in the days of his boyhood and early

youth, he had so often gazed at from that very spot, and in the silence of his heart he promised his Mary in heaven, that he would watch over her child, and guide her on her dangerous way with as firm a hand, and as steady an eye as if he too was beyond the reach of human fears, hopes, and passions. It was a sacred vow, the fruit of one of those emotions which sink into the heart, until they deepen into action. Margaret turned over the leaves of her music-book, and then shutting it again suddenly, she looked up with gentle and earnest countenance; her voice trembled slightly, as she said—

“I will tell you the exact truth, Walter. I like Edmund Neville,—how much or how little I scarcely know myself. It is a strange thing to me to like a new acquaintance, a person of my own age, and one so unlike those whom I have hitherto so dearly loved—I cannot tell you how dearly, Walter;”—tears again rushed into her

eyes, but she restrained them, and they only trembled on her dark eyelashes—"and now that I think he likes me ; that he has all but told me so ; I am afraid of him, of myself, and of you, Walter," she added, with increasing emotion, "for I see that my folly makes you unhappy. If it be so, Walter—if you really think ill of him—if, indeed, as you said just now, the truth is not in him, I will give up '*mon premier secret, mon dernier bonheur !*' "

Walter rose and came to her side ; his voice was perfectly calm, as he slowly and emphatically said—

"My dear child, I spoke without sufficient grounds when I accused Edmund Neville ; I have no right to advance such a charge against him, and if you have seen that in him which has touched your heart, I dare not judge him !—I dare not trust my own aching fears—and yet—Margaret, my own dear child, beware !—Forget

what I have said—think not of me, of my over-intense solicitude—but watch him—watch yourself—trifle not with a treasure of priceless worth—give it not rashly away—pause—and pray. I can say no more.”

Margaret gave her hand to Walter who pressed it earnestly to his lips; both rose together and stood at the window, gazing at the black heavy clouds which were careering wildly across the sky, driven along by the same stormy gusts of wind that swept away before them the last lingering leaves of autumn. They did not speak; both their hearts were full, and both started when the voice of Colonel Leslie disturbed their reverie; he was standing at the door of the library, and his manner, if possible, still more stern and formal than usual, when he said to Margaret who had turned round and advanced to meet him,

“ Will you be so good as to come for a moment to my room ? ”



She called one of the Newfoundland dogs that was lying on the rug, whispered to Walter as she passed him, "Look at Ebro's tail. I am sure it goes between his legs out of sympathy;" bent down a minute to stroke the old dog, and entered her father's room, to which she had never been invited before in that formal manner, or, indeed, in any manner at all.

Their relative positions had assumed an unfortunate character from the first moment of his return to England. On her arrival in London, her warm and impetuous feelings had been chilled by his cold reception, and unaccustomed to conceal her impressions, the reaction of his manner on her's had been so instantaneous that he had never discovered in her the least appearance of attachment to himself. He remained persuaded that prejudices against him had been carefully instilled into her mind by her mother's family, and he never, for a moment, imagined that she

had been kept in ignorance of the facts of his second marriage, and of the existence of his youngest daughter. He was therefore often annoyed at remarks which she made in perfect unconsciousness, and which he attributed to motives which were entirely foreign to her thoughts ; what he considered her determined silence on the subject appeared to him heartless affectation, and as his irritation increased, his reserve increased with it. Margaret, persuaded that he disliked her, did not set rightly to work, even in the supposition that this was actually the case. She was hurt at the coldness of his manner to herself, and provoked at his indifference to all her objects of interest, animate and inanimate ; and she often put forward, in a marked manner, her English predilections and her English prejudices in a way that, supposing her to be acquainted with her father's history, would have been a want of feeling and good taste. One day espe-

cially that she was provoked by some sarcastic remarks which Colonel Leslie had made on English manners and habits, she exclaimed with warmth that "Bad as they might be, she never wished to adopt any others; and that a foreigner would always appear to her a creature of another nature than her own." Another time she spoke with marked dislike and contempt of Catholics, in a tone which Walter Sydney always checked, although he was not himself free from annoyance at the predilection, which, without professing it himself, Colonel Leslie evinced for the Catholic religion. On this last occasion he turned his eyes on Margaret with a stern expression, which soon changed into one of painful thoughtfulness and deep abstraction. These misunderstandings embittered all their domestic intercourse, and maintained in his mind a sense of resentment against those who were, as he believed, supporting Margaret against him, and

keeping alive her prejudices against his absent child. It was in this spirit, and under these unfavourable impressions that the father and daughter met on the occasion we are adverting to.

He pointed to a large green Morocco chair, telling her to sit down, and standing himself opposite to her with his back to the fire, he cleared his throat two or three times and then said abruptly,—

“ I have received a letter this morning, which obliges me to speak to you on a subject which has never yet been mentioned between us.”

Margaret took Ebro's front paws and placed them on her lap.

“ I know not, he continued, what impression it will make upon you. Should it be unfavourable, I trust you will not let me perceive it, for I would scarcely forgive any ungracious feeling on such an occasion.”

To command graciousness is certainly not the

most likely mode of obtaining it, and as Margaret bent her head down over the shaggy forehead of the Newfoundland dog, a slight rebellious swelling at her heart responded to this unlucky exhortation.

“ You are, of course, aware that you *have* a sister ? ”

“ Have I ? ” Margaret exclaimed, as her cheeks grew crimson, and her eyes filled with tears, and Ebro snatched away his paws which she had unconsciously pressed too hard.

“ I cannot suppose,” her father sternly continued, “ that your relations have kept you in ignorance on this point ; and among those moral obligations, in which, as I am assured, you have been carefully instructed, I should hope that the duty of receiving your sister with kindness and affection, may be prominent in your estimation.” The tone in which this was said stung Margaret to the quick. If her feelings had been left to their natural course, she would probably have flung her

arms round her father's neck, and exclaimed in a transport of delight, "Then, I have a sister! Let me see her! Let me go to her!" but her heart was swelling at that moment with indignant feeling at what she considered her father's injustice and harshness to herself; the joy, which that announcement would in itself have caused her, was swallowed up in her resentment, at the manner in which it had been made, and she answered with bitterness,—

"I have always loved those who love me; but for strangers, whether related to me or not, I feel nothing but indifference."

Colonel Leslie's brow darkened, and he answered sternly,—

"I regret to find that such are your feelings, but although *they* may not be under your control your *actions* are, and I must request you to bear in mind that on the manner in which you treat your sister, whose acquaintance you will

soon make, will in a great measure depend my regard for yourself."

"I ought gratefully to accept *any* means that may serve to open to me the way to *your* regard!" as she pronounced these words, her emotion almost choked her, but she made an effort, an unfortunate one, for it was wounded *feeling* had begun the sentence, and it was irritated temper that finished it, and added—"however unwelcome in themselves they may be."

Colonel Leslie bit his lip, and said calmly, but with bitterness,—

"Allow me to hope that these *amiable* sentiments have been suggested to you by others. I suppose they are the result of the instructions which Walter Sydney has so sedulously bestowed upon you!"

Margaret's eyes flashed fire at this unjust insinuation, and looking her father full in the face, she replied,—

“You do not know Walter Sydney ! you can never have known him, or you could not for an instant have supposed that anything but what was good and true and kind was suggested by him !”

Her energy seemed to please her father, and he looked at her with greater kindness.

“You do not perhaps know, Margaret,” he said, “that there is a foul and noxious weed which can embitter and stain the purest and the sweetest fountains. *Prejudice* is its name, and one drop of it will turn to gall the milk of human kindness even in the gentlest natures. Walter’s prejudices have so often taken the form of virtues, that at last they have become identified with them in his mind, and if you have imbibed them, I can only lament the day when I consigned you to his friendly care.”

“I could almost find it in my heart to join in that regret,” returned Margaret, “for it is perhaps dangerous to one’s happiness to be loved



with a tenderness which nothing can surpass, and to see before one, day by day, the example of a goodness which throws all other merits into the shade, and which makes the coldness and hardness of the world so strange and so repugnant."

"I am sorry to hear you have found the world so cold and so hard. Indeed I fancied you were only just out of the school-room, but these perhaps are Walter's phrases; as I would fain hope that some of your sentiments are borrowed from him."

"There is a phrase of his," she returned, "which I *have* noticed and remembered, 'The world is to each of us that scene of action where we meet with our first sorrows, and encounter our first temptations, and that may be in the solitude of our chambers, or in the midst of our family.' *I have met with my world to day.*"

She pronounced these last words so inaudibly that they escaped Colonel Leslie's attention, and he resumed in a dry and measured tone.

“As we cannot enter into each other’s feelings, we had better confine ourselves to matters of fact. However unwelcome the intelligence may be to you, I must inform you that your sister will soon arrive in England, and of course soon after at Grantley. I trust that by that time you will have made up your mind to receive her, if not with affection at least with kindness.

The cold manner in which this was said was lost on Margaret. Her face was hid in her hands, torrents of tears were forcing their way through her slight fingers, while her breast heaved with uncontrollable emotion. “My sister! My sister!” she repeated two or three times, and if Colonel Leslie could have read into the heart of his weeping and agitated child, he would have snatched her to his bosom, and the icy wall which had erected itself between them would have melted in the emotion of that hour like snow in the sunshine. But *Silence—Silence—* that fearful

engine of good and of evil,—by turns the sacred guardian of our holiest feelings, the stern jailor of our purest impulses, or the seconder of our worst passions,—stood between them ; and Colonel Leslie turned away and left the room with a clouded brow and a troubled spirit, while his daughter clasped her hands together, and with passionate vehemence exclaimed—

“ Sister ! Sister ! I have yearned for thee by day, and dreamed of thee by night ! and now the thought of thee has come like a dark cloud in a sunny sky. It haunts, it bewilders, it oppresses me. Dear Walter, come to me. Speak to me—*you* love me, Walter, *you* care for me. Never leave me, Walter ! ”

She looked up and Walter was by her side, gazing into her face with that anxious expression with which he always watched every turn of her countenance. That he should be actually there at the very moment when she was somewhat

poetically addressing him in her excitement, turned the current of her thoughts, and a bright smile flashed through her tears, as she said—

“Walter, I think you are a magician. I have only to think of you, and you appear!”

He smiled also and answered—

“Why, Margaret, if it requires magic to guess when you want me, I plead guilty to the charge, for I know pretty well when my spoilt child requires her Old Walter to scold her for her tears, and to tell her at nineteen, what he told her at three, that crying is of no use, but to make people look ugly—”

“That is all nonsense, Walter. In the first place, I do not look ugly now. Do I?”

He could not say she did—bright tears were rolling down her flushed cheeks, like rain-drops on a damask rose,—“and in the next place crying does one a great deal of good. It is like a thunder-storm. It clears the air.”

“Then you must not speak as if I had nothing to cry about, Walter ; an angry and unkind father is a real sorrow.”

“Hush, Margaret. You do not mean what you say.”

“I do mean what I say ; and more than I say, too. I have a sister ! I could love this sister with my whole heart ! and this might have been one of the happiest days of my existence. Well, my father made me feel for a moment as if I hated that sister, and as if I was the most miserable of human beings. I can hardly forgive him for spoiling, by his unjust and harsh conduct, the happiness I might have felt at such a moment as this. I should not have wept, I should not have had this aching pain at my heart, on the day when I first heard of my sister. Why did you not tell me about her ? I shall begin soon to think you unkind too, Walter.”

“Perhaps I ought to have prepared you for

this, Margaret, but your father's second marriage——”

“ Stop—O yes—I understand—my head is so confused—yes, I see my father married again, or I could not have had a sister. When did he marry? Whom did he marry? ”

“ He married very soon after your mother's death, (a deep but quickly suppressed sigh was breathed by Walter as he said this) and his second wife——”

“ Was an Italian, was she not? ” interrupted Margaret, “ why have we never seen her? Tell me all about it.”

“ We know but little on the subject Margaret. She died two years after her marriage, and during her life-time there was little communication between your father and any of us. You know that with the exception of one short visit, he has ever since remained constantly absent, and he has never opened his lips to me, or, as far as I know,

to any one here, about his second marriage. I did not feel sure, after so complete a silence, that even if his daughter were still alive, he had the intention of bringing her to England. As I thought you were ignorant of her existence, I did not think myself justified in speaking to you on a subject which might only have disturbed your mind, and concerning which I felt myself so much in the dark. Do you forgive me now?"

"Perhaps I do; though I think we might have puzzled over it together. My sister must be much younger than me."

"She must be about seventeen, I think," replied Walter; "her birth was formally announced to us at the time."

"And what is her name? do you know that?"

"Ginevra, I believe. Her mother's name was Ginevra Ferrari."

"It is a pretty name. I wonder if she is

pretty ! I do long to see her ! How differently I feel now from what I did when my father was speaking to me ! It is like the reverse of that pretty passage in Tasso—

‘ Così a l’egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi  
Di soave licor gli orli del vaso, &c.’

‘ The bitterness was on the edge of *this* cup, and the deep, deep sweetness within.’ ”

“ I hope you will let your father see that you have found it so.”

Margaret smiled, and pressed the tip of her tongue on her lips.

“ I am afraid of tasting the bitterness again when I speak to *him*. But, Walter, how glad I am I learnt Italian ! Do you think that Ginevra speaks English ? I shall be afraid of speaking Italian to her. What will grandmamma say to all this, and Mrs. Dalton, who thinks, I believe, that foreigners stand between English people and monkeys, as her favourite sea-anemones between



animals and vegetables? But then, of course, papa's daughter is not quite a foreigner. Is she, Walter?"

What Walter answered to this was somewhat indistinct; and at that moment a servant entered to summon Margaret to the drawing-room, where some visitors had arrived, whom she hurried to receive with as much civility as was consistent with her extreme annoyance at their appearance. Walter followed her; and the new comers little dreamed, as for half-an-hour they made small talk to the inhabitants of Grantley Manor, that there was not one of them whose thoughts were not as distant as possible from county balls, parish meetings, and even boards of guardians, subjects to which Mr. Thornton was seldom wholly insensible, but which were now blended with visions of orange groves and black eyes, to him, indeed, far less attractive, but, at that moment, strange to say, more engrossing.

## CHAPTER VI.

It will easily be imagined that during the days that followed the announcement which had created so much excitement at Grantley Manor, the arrival of the second or the Italian Miss Leslie, as she was more often designated, was the subject of every conversation, except when Colonel Leslie's presence interfered with their discussions. Before him it appeared a forbidden topic, and as he was the only person who could have given correct information as to the time and manner of that arrival, and as to the object of this intense curiosity, there was ample scope for every kind of speculation. Colonel Leslie seemed desirous that the present party should not break up; and from this Margaret inferred that he was

anxious not to be left alone with her, at a moment, which both equally dreaded, and yet longed for. No words were again exchanged between them on the subject. She made a few timid allusions to it, in the hope of counteracting the false impression he had received from her manner on that first occasion; but he checked all approach to it with so much sternness and decision, that she gave up the attempt, and at last said to herself, with a mixture of impatience and satisfaction—

“ Well, he *must* speak, however, before she arrives, or how will her room be got ready? and he does so hate talking to Mrs. Ramsay, that I think he will condescend to give *me* his orders ! ”

She was struck by the earnest manner with which her father pressed the Sydneys and Thorntons to prolong their visit, and with still greater pleasure she heard his invitation to Edmund Neville to remain with them till over

the Christmas holidays, first faintly declined, and then finally accepted. Mrs. Thornton greatly preferred Grantley Manor to the Parsonage; she felt an ardent desire to be present at the arrival of Ginevra, (which event she often told her husband was the turning-point in their lives), but at the same time she would have wished to testify by her absence her utter disapprobation of the existence of such a person—indeed, her unconsciousness of it—for as she had just assured Margaret, she could not admit the right of that foreign girl to be called Colonel Leslie's daughter in any sense, but that she happened to be his daughter; a fact which she would protest against as long as she lived.

“But as it is a fact, grandmamma,” resumed Margaret, “you must make the best of it.”

“I will never bow to facts, my love, when they go against my conscience.”

Mr. Sydney, who was reading the newspaper in a corner of the room, laid it down to ask Mrs.

Thornton what was the precise meaning of bowing to a fact.

Mrs. Thornton never hesitated; the readiness of her answers was quite remarkable, and it was with the most triumphant rapidity that she replied—

“To yield one’s own opinions, Mr. Sydney, to the tyrannical force of material obstacles.”

“Then I suppose you do not intend to expose yourself to the very material obstacle which Miss Ginevra’s presence will oppose to your theory of her nonentity?”

“I shall meet her,” returned Mrs. Thornton, with a deep sigh, “as something that exists, indeed, but which ought never to have existed.”

And having uttered this protest against any share she might have been supposed to have in so blameable an affair as Ginevra’s existence, Mrs. Thornton felt herself justified in giving a dignified assent to the request that she would prolong her

visit indefinitely, and Mr. Thornton, whose easy disposition was without difficulty reconciled to any scheme that was approved of by his wife and Margaret, offered no opposition to the plan.

The inhabitants of Heron Castle were more stubborn. Mr. Sydney positively refused; and it was at last arranged that he and his wife should return home for a fortnight, but promising to spend Christmas and the ensuing weeks at Grantley. Walter had stoutly resisted Margaret's intreaties that he would at once remain with them, and persisted in this resolution till a private conversation with her father secured the consent which she had vainly sought. During that interview words which had trembled on the lips of both during the last few weeks, found vent at last, and well nigh led to an abrupt termination of their early friendship; but both had checked themselves in time: both felt that the time was not come when they could explain,

upbraid, or, above all, part. Too much was at stake for both. It was not expediency, but a higher kind of prudence that prompted this feeling—the instinctive value each set upon the other's regard. Leslie was displeased with Walter, for he imputed to him what he believed to be his daughter's unamiable prejudices, and Walter was angry with him for what he considered his injustice and coldness to Margaret; but both felt that—

“They had been friends in youth—”

they knew that

“— to be wroth with those we love,  
Doth work like madness in the brain,”

and they stopped in time, ere they had spoken words to each other which would have severed their friendship, and sent them each on their separate way in silent pride and unavailing regret.

When Walter, with a stubborn brow, persisted

coldly in his intention of leaving the house on the following day, Leslie made a strong effort over himself, and said, in a thick, and nervous voice—

“If you will not stay for my sake, let it be for Mary’s sake.”

Walter gave a start, pressed his brow with his hand, and struggled not to speak.

“It is not *she*,” continued Leslie, with agitation, “who would have set one of my children against the other, and who, after sowing the seeds of enmity where love should have been, would have left me alone to reap the bitter harvest !”

“Leslie !” exclaimed Walter, with impetuosity, “do justice to your daughter, as you do to her long-forgotten mother, and you may think as hardly as you please of me. If you consider Margaret capable of one harsh or mean feeling—I care not who you suppose suggested it—you do her injustice, and you will some day have to



answer for it. If you think *me* capable of setting her against your daughter—”

“Always ‘*my* daughter!’ Can you not call her—*her* sister?” interrupted Colonel Leslie, with bitterness.

Walter continued without noticing this remark—

“Why am I, who love her as you should have loved her, to stay and see what I frankly confess to you I cannot witness without impatience, the coldness and indifference with which you treat her; and to which there may, perhaps, be soon afforded a striking contrast.”

“Then stay!” returned Leslie, eagerly. “Stay, if such be your feelings, and warn her from pursuing a line of conduct which will sever for ever those who should ever have been united. I can allow for the vehemence of your language, for I know, by painful experience, that to think those we love are wronged and undervalued is one of the

bitterest trials to human nature. But do not imagine" here Colonel Leslie's lip curled with that sneer which had become almost habitual to his countenance "do not imagine that I cannot admire that pretty, spoilt child, whom you have all fed with praises and nursed with homage, until you all, and herself among the number, call it coldness and injustice not to be in constant adoration before her. I do admire her; but I certainly wish she did not admire herself quite so much."

"I will not defend your daughter," cried Walter, warmly, "against a charge which you would not make did you know her better, or myself from that of loving her with the most devoted affection one human being ever felt for another."

"Walter," said Colonel Leslie, "I wonder you do not marry Margaret!"

Walter turned fiercely round. If Leslie had threatened to burn Heron Castle to the ground,

or to ruin him by one stroke of his pen, he could not have looked as if a more mortal injury had been done him.

“Is this a cruel jest or a premeditated insult?” he murmured at last, with a knit brow and compressed lips.

“Neither, I assure you ; but my position is a singular one, and I am beginning to be tired of it. It taxes my powers of endurance somewhat beyond their extent. Margaret throws in my teeth, on every occasion, your extraordinary perfections, which, it appears, disenchant her with all the rest of mankind, and you upbraid me for not idolising her very faults with a blind partiality, which, I confess, would become a lover more than a father or a friend.”

Walter looked Leslie steadily in the face ; his own was as pale as a sheet, and with a strong effort he said—

“Leslie, I give you my most sacred word of

honour, that the idea of marrying your daughter never crossed my mind till this present moment. You have done me injustice, but I know you will believe my word."

"But in Heaven's name," exclaimed Leslie with impatience, "are you mad that you charge me with injustice at every word I utter. What have I accused you of? What crime have I laid to your charge, you most incomprehensible and intractable of men? Would it have been anything but satisfactory to me if my earliest friend, if the man whom I respect most in the world, though he tries my temper more than any other, the heir of Heron Castle and the possessor of a large fortune, had taken a fancy to marry a little girl, whose blue eyes and red cheeks might plead his excuse for throwing himself away upon her? I acknowledge my error, and it was not necessary to undeceive me in so solemn a manner; but I really did suppose that you had made love

to the child, and (forgive me if this is any reflection on your great superiority to the rest of mankind), that it accounted for that burst of enthusiasm with which she favoured me, and gave me to understand that we were none of us, myself among the number, fit to wipe your shoes."

"Leslie, we never understood each other, and now less than ever, if you cannot conceive that I would rather have died—"

"Than married my daughter? O, just as you please. The little coquette will, no doubt, have plenty of admirers, and in time a husband."

"I would rather have died," repeated Walter, with a voice that trembled with emotion, "than have spoken one word of love to the child whom you entrusted to my care, or have made one conscious effort to gain affection such as might not have been bestowed upon a father or a brother. Did you really think, as I saw her day by day, during those years of happiness, and

all her young pure thoughts were opened to me without reserve, that I had turned that intimacy to account, taken advantage of her solitude, of her warm, affectionate, grateful feelings, to win for myself the treasure which you, and she whom you have once named to-day after so many years of silence, had given to me in charge? No, no! Thank God, that thought never crossed me; if it had, I should have flung it from me like a serpent. Though for some years past, I have loved her with the most boundless affection, and would gladly die to secure her happiness; though I feel now that your words have presented to my mind a vision of bliss which will disturb my peace, and may ruin my happiness; I do not the less affirm that if she were herself to come, and put her hand in mine, and with that calm look of confiding affection with which she has ever raised her eyes to mine, were to say, 'Walter, I love you, and I will be your wife,' I would tell her that she was a child,

and that she knew not what she said nor what she did—the same words I used when twelve years ago, she put her diamond necklace round the throat of a little beggar who had seen it in its shining case and cried to have it. Now, perhaps, you understand me !”

Leslie wrung his hand, and turned aside in silence, but after a minute he said,

“ It is all a mistake, Walter—you are as romantic as a boy, and will not see things as they really are ; but it is not my business nor my intention to persuade you into marrying Margaret, though it would be but fair, perhaps,”—this was said with a smile which, for once, was not a sneer,—“ that having spoilt her by such noble and self-denying affection as is rarely met with in this world, you should take her off my hands ; but we will not speak of it again. Stay with us. You *must*, Walter. There is a trial at hand for us all. Memory is sore, and those moments are painful

when life re-opens the wounds which time has closed but not healed."

These words did what they were intended to do. Different as they were, there existed the strongest attachment between these two men. Walter, especially, loved Leslie with all his soul. He was his oldest and dearest friend. When he had been discouraged and disappointed in early life, he had shown him an affectionate kindness which had never been forgotten. When Leslie married the woman he himself loved best in the world, no jealous or resentful feeling found place in his heart—and as he could not hate him, he only loved him better than ever, for her sake now as well as for his own. Mary's husband, the object of Mary's affection, became to him even dearer than the friend of his youth had been; the last words she ever said to him were, "Dear Walter, always love Henry;" and now when Henry, after a long absence and some estrangement, for the



first time gave him a glimpse into his feelings, and that glimpse revealed much secret suffering, the affection and the memories of past years revived, and Old Walter was persuaded to remain at Grantley, and yielded a gruff assent to Leslie's last "You will stay then?" just as twenty years before he was taken out fishing or hunting against his will, and dragged from his beloved books or Mary Thornton's piano-forte by the same half-imperious and half-affectionate compulsion.

On the evening of that day Margaret was sitting at the round table, near the fire, busily engaged in copying one of Flaxman's etchings of Shakespeare. It was the one in which Ophelia distributes flowers to the wondering and pitying courtiers; and she was deeply occupied, either with her drawing or with her thoughts, for, contrary to her usual habits, she had been silent for nearly an hour. Mrs. Sydney and Mrs. Dalton were playing at piquet, Mrs. Thornton was

knitting in the arm-chair between the table and the fire, and the two Mr. Sydneys and Edmund Neville were reading the newspapers. At last Walter put his down, and she said to him in a low voice—

“So, I find you stay after all?”

He nodded assent.

“That convinces me of what I would not at first believe.”

“What is that?”

“That you love my father better than me. Nothing would make you stay when I begged you, and now, after that endless conversation in the library, it is all settled!”

“Are you sorry for it?”

“O no; my dignity never interferes with my pleasure! It plays second fiddle to it on every occasion. Are you shocked?”

“That depends on what you call dignity. I have a dislike to that whole set of words—‘Self-

respect !' 'Dignity !' 'Proper pride !' They are either the wrong names for Duty and Conscience, or they disguise, under specious terms, the very tempers against which Christians should struggle. But I do not approve of self-gratification playing the first fiddle, as you express it, on every occasion."

"Oh, you are so hard on that poor persecuted self of our's. Your own comes worst off, like a schoolmaster's son that gets flogged oftener than the other boys that his father may not be accused of partiality ; but that is no comfort to other people's selves."

"I thought you particularly admired self-denial, Margaret?"

"When I *read* of it, beyond expression. Do you remember my crying one day, when I was a little girl, because I could not be a martyr, and my asking you very earnestly if there was no hope of a persecution in our days?"

“No, I don’t.”

“Don’t you recollect it? and your advising me to drop some hot sealing-wax on my hand, and see if I could bear it without flinching, before I prayed that the days of persecution might return?”

“That was cruel, I think.”

“No; it was a practical lesson which I have never forgotten; it was at that time, too, that I gave Mr. Dempson the print of St. Lucy, which I wished him to hang opposite to that dreadful black leather chair of his.”

“Did he?”

“No; he did not think it would keep up the spirits of his patients, he said, and it would make them think him an executioner. But I always took my print with me when I went to that horrid room; and when I had lost one tooth, I did so admire St. Lucy for losing *all* her’s. How do you like my drawing, Walter?”

"It is very pretty, but not the least like the original."

"I did not intend it to be. Do you know what engrossed me so much just now? I was trying to represent in this drawing the image I form in my own mind of my sister's appearance."

Edmund Neville looked up from his book, drew the paper on which Margaret had been employed towards him, and examined it attentively. She was still talking in an eager tone to Walter—

"Now, of six people who may be thinking at the same moment of Ginevra, I suppose that no two among us have the same idea about her—the same form before our eyes when we name her. I wonder if our fancies *are* at all alike—yours and mine, for instance! I wish we could all draw."

"We can *all* write," said old Mr. Sydney; and, drawing a bit of paper before him, he wrote these six lines—

"With eyes as black as any coal,  
With cheeks as yellow as an orange;

With Leslie's nose, and Leslie's soul,  
Just modelled into something strange—  
Which English eyes will scarce approve,  
And English hearts will never love."

Mrs. Thornton seized the paper, and read aloud this effusion with much emphasis, and a particular pause at the word *never*, much like what street-singers make in the last line of "Rule Britannia," when they assert that "Britons *never* will be slaves." Her conscience smote her, however, at this unqualified denunciation of eternal dislike to poor Ginevra; and she added, with a glance at her husband, and at Walter, who had coughed and fidgetted since the lecture of his father's verses, "Indeed, we *never* can love her with a natural love; but we will try to love her; even as a hen can love the duck she has hatched."

As Mrs. Thornton had in no sense, literal or figurative, hatched the youngest Miss Leslie, the comparison did not seem much to the point, but

it satisfied her own sense of duty ; that was enough for the moment. Margaret, however, seemed annoyed, and she bent her head over her portfolio with a heightened colour. When she raised her eyes, she met those of Edmund Neville. With a sudden embarrassment, she took up her pencil again without speaking. He said, across the table,

“ You were about to say something. What do *you* think of Mr. Sydney’s sketch ? ”

“ That I am sure it is as unlike my sister, as the concluding sentiment is unlike what *I* feel about her.”

As she said these words, she held out her hand for her drawing, which he had retained a few minutes.

“ You have done something to it ! ” she exclaimed, hastily. “ It is quite altered ; but much improved.”

“ Nonsense,” cried Edmund. “ What odd fancies you have. I will draw the original of Mr.

Sydney's picture ;” and he sketched in ink a masculine, foreign-looking woman, with so striking a likeness to Colonel Leslie, and even a slight one to Margaret herself, that all those round the table were in fits of laughter ; and the attention was directed from Margaret's drawing, which she put up in her portfolio a few minutes afterwards.

Since the eventful day in which a new page of life had opened to Margaret, she had felt the strongest conviction that Edmund Neville was in love with her. This persuasion gained fresh strength every hour, although he had never again opened his lips on the subject ; but he watched her constantly ; he appeared anxious on every subject to hear and to understand her opinions ; he seemed desirous of speaking to her alone, but when the opportunity presented itself, he either abruptly withdrew, after a few insignificant remarks, or he became abstracted in thought. Margaret struggled against the increasing interest



she felt in him, and, in compliance with Walter's request, she tried to pause, to watch him, and examine herself; but these efforts only served to prove to her how engrossing was that interest—how strong were those feelings. The more she watched him, the more she was convinced that he liked her; but, at the same time that it was impossible for her to doubt this, she sometimes felt chilled and disappointed at the mixture of coldness and hardness which accompanied the lively interest he so evidently took in her. When she sang, he seldom left the pianoforte, but it was with his head buried in his hands that he listened; and sometimes, after asking her for some particular song, he would suddenly walk away before it was finished. No day passed in which her heart did not at one moment swell with the consciousness of being loved, and beat with the hurried pulsation of joy at what seemed some unequivocal proof of affection, and in the next

sink with that faint sickening feeling of disappointment which a few careless words occasion when they convey the impression that the speaker's future fate and projects are in no way connected in his mind with our own. To Margaret, whose nature it was to reveal each passing thought, if not in words, at least by the expression of her eyes, or the tones of her voice, the restraint was almost intolerable ; and when she had seen, or felt throughout the day, that Edmund had gazed on her for hours together—that if she spoke, he would, in listening to her, seem unconscious of the presence of others—and that a phrase, which he had begun in a tone of levity, would end with a sudden expression of feeling that seemed to promise a renewal of that explanation which she had once so rashly checked,—and yet when no approach to such a better understanding was really made, and he would announce some plan, or make some remark, utterly inconsistent with the vision which

she had fondly conjured up—her manner involuntarily grew impatient and irritable, and assumed a character which was not natural to her ; or, perhaps, to speak more truly, betrayed faults of character which were scarcely perceptible as long as the current of her life glided on without a ripple to disturb its smooth surface.

One day, when this had been the case, and that she had answered with petulance some trifling question that had been addressed to her, and left the room with a cloud on her brow, and the lines round her mouth curved into that shape which occasionally spoilt the perfect beauty of her face, Edmund turned to Walter, and asked him in a careless tone if Miss Leslie was ill-tempered. Walter turned a deaf ear to the question, and went on cutting a pencil at the wrong end. He would rather have died at that moment than acknowledged that Margaret was not an angel ; but as angels do not frown and slam doors after

them, he felt reduced to silence ; but in a few seconds he said, in a calm voice—

“ She has not been taught by sorrow the severe lesson of self-control. She must learn it some day, but woe to those through whom she learns it, if they deal not truly and gently with her.”

“ I should imagine,” replied Edmund, “ that your little favourite was more likely to sin against others, than to be sinned against herself.”

Walter raised his eyes doubtfully, and looked at Edmund as if he would have ascertained the exact meaning of those last words. He continued in the same tone—

“ I should fancy that her sister will have rather a difficult part to play here. Have you any idea what sort of person she is ? ”

“ No,” was the concise answer. There was another pause, and then Edmund laid his hand upon Walter’s shoulder, and said in a low voice—

“ I have a great mind to tell you what brings

me here, and what keeps me here. You are the person, of all others, who will give me the best advice, and I know I can entirely trust you."

Walter's face underwent a sudden change, and he answered with an impetuosity which seemed to take Neville by surprise—

"You are wrong; you can neither trust *me* in this matter, nor can I trust myself to speak upon it. Put whatever construction you choose on my words. I care not what you infer from them, but I will not listen to one word on a subject on which I am not able to do justice to you, to myself, or to others."

As he said this, he snatched a book from the table, and hurried into the flower-garden, where, on her knees on the mould, Margaret was tying up some China-asters, which had hitherto braved the nightly frosts, but whose drooping heads hung down as if foreboding their approaching fate.

“Walter,” she cried, “help me to fasten these supports into the ground.”

“It is of no use : you will catch cold : come in : leave those dying flowers alone.”

“Poor things!” she said, lifting up their heads once more, and then letting them fall again, “They were looking so bright and so strong when I planted them three months ago. Walter, I wish time would stand still or go back, or do anything but go on.”

“I thought I heard you wish exactly the contrary yesterday ; you said, it never seemed to you to go fast enough.”

“Don’t quote me against myself, Walter ; there is nothing so annoying. ‘*You said the other day !*’ and ‘*Did I not tell you so ?*’ are the most provoking sentences in the world, and you are always using them.”

As Walter looked grave and did not answer, she continued with increasing irritation. “No-

body can be expected to be always in the same mind, and to weigh every one of their words before speaking, unless they are very old, and methodical, and precise, and tiresome too."

As she spoke she sat down on the stone steps, and began twitching off the heads of the unfortunate asters which a moment before she had so much pitied and tended.

"You will make yourself ill, Margaret, if you stay here any longer. Pray come in."

"I am not cold, thank you. Pray don't stay with me if you find it cold."

Her flushed check did not belie her assertion. After a pause, Walter said—

"I pity your friends, Margaret, if they are to share the fate of those flowers. So much kindness at one moment, and such harshness the next.

"I have behaved ill to you, Walter, have I not? Oh! now I am quite miserable. I hate

myself, and only wish that everybody would hate me too."

"That is still more unkind to me, Margaret, for you know that is the only thing I cannot do."

The tears sprang into Margaret's eyes; she held out her hand to Walter, and turned her head away. When he again pressed her to come home, she answered gently,—“No, dear, dear Walter, let me sit here a little while. The house is stifling—my head aches, and the air does me good.” In a moment Walter had brought from the house a large fur cloak, and wrapped her up in it, with the same care as if he had been dressing a baby; tying the strings under her chin, and clasping the collar so tight, that she cried for mercy, and then laughed; and then, when Walter said,—“Well, it is pleasant to see you laugh again,” she burst into tears, and all was right again between Walter and herself. As those



bright tears fell fast on the dark fur of the cloak, the cloud seemed to pass away from her fair brow, and after a pause, during which he held her hand in his, he asked her in so gentle a manner what had disturbed and vexed her, that she longed to tell him—that she tried to tell him—but the words stuck in her throat. It seemed so very childish, so very foolish, she said; and there came another half-smile across her face, and a few more big tears rolled down her cheek. At last, with her eyes on the ground, and drawing patterns on the gravel with his stick, she murmured, “It is only that Mr. Neville said to Mrs. Dalton, before me, that he never would marry a short woman, and—and—I suppose I am short.” When she had said this, the colour rushed into her cheeks, and she exclaimed with impetuosity, “Do not laugh, Walter, do not laugh. I cannot bear it. I know how ridiculous it must seem to you. I suppose you think it is

all childish nonsense. Sometimes I hope so myself," she added, with a sigh, "but it makes my heart ache very much, whatever it is." Had she looked into Walter's face, she would have seen that it was unnecessary to warn him against laughing. She continued in a moment with increasing emotion, "It is wrong, perhaps, to acknowledge this sort of feeling—to let you see my folly, my weakness. I do not know how I can dare to speak so openly to you, but you know, Walter, how used I have been to tell you everything; and when you ask me in that kind manner what vexes me, I feel obliged to speak the truth."

"Always do so, my own Margaret. It is acting kindly by me, as well as justly by yourself. And may God give me strength always to deal kindly and truly by you!"

"How could you do otherwise?" she exclaimed. "What interest could you have in all this, but my happiness?"

“None, I trust,” replied Walter, solemnly, “and, as long as you consider me as a friend, and a——”

“Father,” she cried, and pressed his hand to her heart. It was the word he was about to use ; but the readiness with which she suggested it, caused him a pang ; but that pang was conquered, and he continued—

“I shall not complain of my little Margaret, or scold her for wishing herself as tall as even her favourite maid, Marian.”

The gaiety with which this was said, was the most complete victory over self which Walter Sydney had yet achieved ; and the triumph was entire when he looked kindly at the little beauty, as standing on tiptoe on the highest step of the flight, and dragging down to her level the coral-studded branch of a tall holly, she turned round and said to him, with one of her own bright smiles—“After all, I am not so very short.”

## CHAPTER VII.

A FEW days after the conversation that closed the last chapter, Colonel Leslie and Margaret were engaged to dinner at Lord Donnington's, whose house was about twelve miles distant from Grantley. Walter and Edmund were to dine there also, and Margaret looked forward with great pleasure to this rather unusual occurrence; as, since her father's arrival, there had been very little intercourse between her and the neighbours. Lord Donnington's daughters were her only friends, and there was between them that sort of intimacy which usually takes place when girls of the same age have been in the habit, during their school-room years, of looking forward to spending the day, or drinking tea together, as to the dissi-

pation and excitement of their otherwise monotonous existence. Maud and Lucy Vincent had been absent for some months from Donnington Castle, and had only returned a week ago from a tour in Italy. Margaret, who had not seen them yet, was very impatient to renew an intercourse which had hitherto been her greatest pleasure in life; and in her present state of uncertainty with regard to Edmund Neville's feelings regarding herself, she was not sorry to have an opportunity of observing him in more general society than her own home ever afforded. Frederic Vincent, Lord Donnington's eldest son, had been, as well as his sisters, a favourite companion in all her childish amusements, and she had always met him with pleasure in his successive holidays, even when, as an Etonian of fourteen, he was reckoned by his sisters the torment of the house and the plague of their lives. He had maintained his place in her good graces chiefly by his praises of her horse-

manship, and his instructions in the management of the numberless pets to which she afforded her protection. This Frederic Vincent, now a young man of twenty-four, was at home again, after an absence of three years. He had joined his family in Italy and returned to England with them. Margaret had not, as far as she knew herself, or as it would be fair to suppose, any deliberate intention of exciting Edmund's jealousy, but, that some idea of the sort had floated vaguely in her mind, it would not perhaps be safe positively to deny. As she finished dressing on that day, and looked at herself in the glass with some degree of complacency, a smile struggled out of the corners of her forcibly compressed lips, which told of pleasant thoughts and agreeable anticipations. When she found herself in the carriage, and, by the faint light reflected from the lamps outside, glanced at the faces of her three companions, she was struck by the contrast that their expression

presented to her own radiant state of mind. Walter, who sat opposite to her, looked the picture of meek resignation. "Dear Walter," she thought to herself, "does not look to advantage to-night;" and so he certainly did not. He was much more smartly dressed than usual; and that sort of smartness which the unpretending are apt to fall into at the suggestion of others, was borne by the unconscious victim without any sense of the extremity of fashion imposed upon him. Then it was also intensely cold. Walter's eyes were red and his nose blue; and, above all, he was resigning himself to his unwonted dissipation with a meek endurance which would have provoked Margaret's laughter if her eyes had not at that moment rested on Edmund's countenance. The carriage was dark, but the outside lamps cast an uncertain light within, which revealed such an expression of gloom and ill-temper as she had never before observed on his features. His lips

were moving rapidly, as if he was speaking to himself, and in a moment he drew from his pocket a thin and crumpled letter, and seemed to strain his eyes to read it by the flitting rays of light behind him. Twice he bit his lips, as if he would have drawn blood from them, and then thrust his head back into the corner with a jerk which indicated anything but repose of mind, whatever case of body that position might give; and when Colonel Leslie, as a violent storm set in, and the snow began to fall under the horses' feet, muttered a curse on the English habit of dining out in the depth of winter, and wished himself and others, in no measured terms, anywhere but where they actually were, Margaret felt her joyous excitement flag, and looked with an anxious eye at the dark sky and the whitening appearance of the road. An impatient feeling crossed her mind as she looked at her companions. "Now if they would but be pleased!" she mentally ex-



claimed, "all would be right. What a pity people have not good tempers! How disagreeable they all are!" With this charitable thought, and the self-approbation which accompanied it, she also resigned herself to meditation in the corner of the carriage. After a weary drive of an hour and three-quarters, the lights of Donnington Castle became visible, and Margaret's joyous "Here we are arrived!" roused her apathetic companions. In a few moments more the steps were let down, and the hall door thrown open. The drawing-room was full of people, and it took about five minutes for everybody to shake hands with everybody, and for the new comers to settle into the tacit discomfort which precedes the announcement of dinner. Margaret's two friends were as different from her and from one another as girls of about the same age could easily be. The eldest was pretty, and so small, that our heroine looked, by her side, what a few days before she had been so

anxious to consider herself, *tall*; her eyes were black and very large, while her mouth was so small that it seemed as if it could scarcely open wide enough to admit a common-sized cherry. She was indisputably pretty; but yet there was something sharp and resolute in her features, which, had her figure been less diminutive, would have given her an unfeminine appearance. The other was tall, slight, high-shouldered and red-haired; you would have said she was exceedingly plain, if it had not occurred to you first to remark that it was impossible to see a sweeter countenance. This one was Lucy, and the short one was Maud. Both received Margaret in the most affectionate manner, and Frederic Vincent, who was like his sister Lucy, but only much better looking, seemed overjoyed at meeting her again; and, in her happiness at finding herself with her earliest friends, for one short instant she asked herself if the new feeling that had taken such tyrannical possession

of her heart, might not, after all, be a mere dream which an act of volition could dispel.

She found herself sitting at dinner by Frederic Vincent, and she immediately entered into an animated conversation with him, having first, by a rapid glance, ascertained that Edmund was exactly opposite to her, and was seated between Maud and Lucy. She had that peculiar talent which some people possess of appearing wholly absorbed in conversation with one person, while they can watch the proceedings of half-a-dozen others; and while she was questioning her neighbour about his travels, and laughing at his view of the hardships of family-travelling with four carriages and a fourgon—far more severe, he said, than anything he had encountered in Egypt or in Syria—she contrived to observe that Edmund was still paler than in the carriage, and that although he was in earnest conversation with the shortest of his neighbours, his voice was nervous and his coun-

tenance clouded. About the middle of the second course, Walter, who was on the other side of Vincent, asked him a question about the Pyramids, which drew from him a long description, which, to her shame be it spoken, did not interest Margaret ; and as Sir John Mortlock, her other neighbour, was nearly asleep, having had a hard run that morning, she was enabled to watch, with undivided attention, the conversation that was going on at the other side of the table. What was it that Maud's thin lips had just uttered, which had made Edmund turn so deadly pale that she wondered how she could have thought him pale at all the moment before? and what could it be, that had made him direct a sudden, searching, anxious look towards herself? That look vibrated through her whole frame, and her hand shook like a leaf. Thoughts darted across her mind in all sorts of directions, contradicting and condemning one another. Had Maud

said anything against her? Shame on herself for the idea! Her best friend abuse her! Had she said, perhaps, that Vincent liked her, and that she hoped she would marry him? Nonsense! she would not say that to a stranger like Edmund! But what could it be? Certainly something had been said that had disturbed him. Now he has swallowed a large glass of wine, and his colour is returning. How flushed is his cheek! How Maud is talking to him! She never allows poor Lucy any chance of making acquaintance with people. What can that long story be that she is telling him? And why does Lucy, who never puts herself forward, seem so fidgetty now, and speak to her sister across Edmund, and insist upon telling him something too, and that with a gentle look in her eyes and a scarcely perceptible glance at herself. Now Walter is satisfied about the Pyramids, and before he can proceed to the Holy Land, which he has a great mind to do,

Vincent turns to Margaret and asks in a low voice—

“ When does your sister arrive? ”

This is a very interesting subject to Margaret, and one which diverts her thoughts more quickly than anything else could have done from her previous cogitations:

“ Why, we do not exactly know. Papa said, on Monday, that she would arrive about the end of the week ; so it might be any day, now.”

“ O, really ! as soon as that ! Will Mr. and Mrs. Warren come with her to Grantley ? ”

“ Who are they ? I do not know anything about them.”

“ Nonsense ! why your sister is travelling with them.”

“ I have never been told one word about her, except that she exists, and that she is coming. So leave off looking so surprised, Frederic, and tell me all you know about it.”

“ About *it*? I can tell you about *her*, if you like. We have seen nothing else at Genoa.”

“ You have seen Ginevra!” exclaimed Margaret, flushed with excitement and looking into her companion’s face with the greatest interest. Another keen and anxious glance was directed towards her from the other side of the table, and her heart whispered to her that Edmund was jealous. The thrill of joy which accompanied this impression, gave such a bright light to her eyes, and such a colour to her cheeks, that Vincent looked at her with admiration and forgot to answer her question, till an impatient “ Well,” called upon him to speak.

“ Well, she is a little like you, but on the whole very unlike any one I have ever seen.”

“ But pretty, pleasing,—is she not?”

“ Why—yes. I suppose so. I never felt quite at my ease with her. You must ask Maud and Lucy all about her. I dare say they will differ

very much, as they generally do, and then you will make to yourself an idea of your own which will probably be quite unlike the reality. It is so useless to describe people. No description ever conveys a right notion of them to others."

"You are very unsatisfactory, but you can at least tell me where and how you made acquaintance with her."

"It was one day that we were sight-seeing at Genoa. We were going through the rooms of the Palazzo Rosso, when we met Mr. and Mrs. Warren, with whom we were slightly acquainted. They are relations of that Mr. Neville who came here with you to-day."

"Oh, then, the people with whom my governess lived some years."

"Exactly! Don't you remember in what a scrape I got with her the last time I was at Grantley, by calling Mrs. Warren a bore?"

"Yes, I do; and I now remember she said



they had been abroad for two years, and she had not heard from them for ages ; but, go on."

" Well, they were just looking at a magnificent Vandyke, the first Marquis of Brignole on horse-back, and near them was a girl with her eyes fixed on this painting, and it struck me immediately that I had never seen such strange eyes or such a peculiar dress."

" And it was Ginevra ? "

" Yes."

" And what was her dress ? "

" A perfectly plain grey gown—no bonnet or shawl—but what is called in Italy a mezzaro ; a sort of veil which covers the head, and hangs down like a scarf."

" And her face?—now do tell me something of her face."

" I have told you I cannot describe it. It is placid, and very pale. At times so pale and so still that she looks like a marble statue. Her

eyes are of such a light blue that they sometimes appear almost colourless. Her hair also is of the fairest sort. The only dark thing in her face are her eyelashes. They are like a black curtain, and throw such a dark shade under those very light eyes, that it has the strangest effect possible."

"Then should you say that her face had no expression?"

"No expression!—why, it is the most expressive I ever saw; that is the peculiarity of it. Notwithstanding that extraordinary stillness of feature, she renders her thoughts, by the intensity of her countenance, in a way that is perfectly astonishing. Seldom does a muscle of her face move but a speck of colour rises in her cheek—and deepens and deepens—while her eyes brighten and seem almost to shine. They do not sparkle like your's, or like Maud's. Lucy says that you remind her of a morning in summer, and your sister of a moonlight night. I wonder what you will think

of her! We met them very often, but I could never make her out. Lucy liked her, I think."

Margaret grew thoughtful, and after a pause, he added—

"How surprised we were when Mrs. Warren, after shaking hands with us, said 'Let me introduce you to Miss Leslie.' It immediately flashed upon me who she was."

"Do you happen to know how she came to travel with Mr. and Mrs. Warren?"

"I heard that when her uncle died, with whom she used to live, your father wrote to the English Consul at Genoa, and asked him if there was any English family there with whom she could safely travel home. He chanced to show this letter to Mr. Warren, who was slightly acquainted with Colonel Leslie, and he and his wife proposed to take charge of your sister—I believe that was the history of it."

"But Ginevra did not live at Genoa, did she?"

“No, I fancy she came from Verona to join them, but how very odd that you should not know more about it!”

Margaret was saved the necessity of answering this remark, by the signal of departure which suddenly interrupted this conversation, and in a few minutes she found herself in a boudoir, which formed a kind of passage between the drawing-room and the conservatory, with Lucy Vincent on the sofa by her side, and Maud seated on a low stool opposite to them, with her face resting on her hands and her elbows on her knees. Those black piercing eyes reminded her of the dumb show which had excited her attention at dinner, and she remained somewhat thoughtful, till Maud exclaimed, as soon as the servants and the coffee-trays had disappeared—

“Are you not dying to hear about your sister?”

Margaret nodded assent, without speaking.

“Has Frederic been talking to you about her?” continued Maud.

"Yes he has — he says *you* like her," said Margaret, turning to Lucy.

Lucy coloured and said,—“She is so very attractive.”

Maud bit her glove, and a strange smile crossed her features.

“Then Frederic thinks I do not like her.”

“He did not tell me so. He says he cannot make her out.”

“Really! Oh I think *I* do, but you shall judge for yourself. Mr. Neville tells me that you expect her in a day or two? How does your grandmamma like the notion of her coming?”

Margaret smiled and shook her head.

“You deal in signs to-day,” Maud said; “will you promise me that if three weeks hence I ask you how you like your sister, and you are afraid of speaking plainly, you will give me one of these mute replies?”

“If I should not like her,” Margaret said, more

seriously than usual, "it will be so painful a subject that I shall not like to joke about it."

"Oh, you will like her, you must like her!" said Lucy, in a low voice.

"Now, really," exclaimed Maud, impatiently, "I cannot understand you, Lucy. You are certainly the most inconsistent person in the world, and if you go on in that way, I must say I shall think it right to speak out. I have no notion of all this kind of sentimental nonsense, and trying to keep people's eyes shut when the best service you can do them is to advise their keeping them wide open."

Lucy bit her lip, and an embarrassing pause succeeded. Margaret felt pained and bewildered. Poor child! it was only since the last few weeks that she had known what it was to feel ill at ease, and she had not yet acquired the art of disguising that uneasiness. Life was beginning to weave around her that thin web of cares too

intricate to be shaken off, and too slender to be noticed by others. Maud broke the oppressive silence by a remark which, though less painful and puzzling than the last, was not of a nature to relieve her tight-bound heart—

“ Do you know, Margaret, that though we have had little time for gossiping since we arrived, yet we have contrived to hear the reports about you and Mr. Neville.”

Margaret grew crimson; except in one single conversation with Walter she had never made or heard any allusion to this subject, and though there was something not disagreeable in the idea that others had observed Edmund's attentions to her, and that the result she had secretly and tremblingly anticipated was confidently expected by the neighbourhood, yet her hands grew cold, and her cheeks glowed, at this familiar and irreverent mention of what had hitherto been lodged in the deepest recesses of her heart. She

answered in a faltering voice, that she had not been aware of the existence of such reports.

“But you acknowledge,” said Maud, laughing, “that there is some foundation for them?”

“No, no. I do not, indeed. Indeed I am not engaged to him.”

“Perhaps not, but about to be?” persisted Maud; and then added seriously, “I should be very glad that it was so, Margaret. Mr. Neville is immensely rich, at least he is the son of an immensely rich man, and those Warrens we met in Italy describe his father’s place in Ireland as the most beautiful that ever was seen.”

“And they say he is very amiable,” observed Lucy.

The thought suggested itself to Margaret’s mind, the involuntary thought, that amiable was not the word she would have used in describing Edmund. Charming—attractive—fascinating, but not *amiable*. No, even in his love (if indeed he



loved her) there was a hardness, a stiffness, a want of consideration for her, even when he was most occupied about her, that was not amiable. But she was in love! Poor Margaret was decidedly in love—for it seemed to her that had he been more amiable, less imperious, less uncertain, she would not have cared so much for each glance of his dark eye, or watched with such trembling anxiety for every proof of interest that his words or his actions might afford. Love does not always blind people. It often makes them keen-sighted, painfully alive to the slightest imperfections in the object of their attachment—but the faults and the failings which are discovered with even acute sensibility, are not hateful as they would be in another—they seem to form a part of what we love, and in our weakness we dare not wish to erase one line of the image engraved in our hearts.

Margaret was roused from these thoughts by

her father's voice. He was standing at the door of the conservatory, and made a sign to her to come and speak to him. She went up to him, and laying his hand on her shoulder, he said, in a low voice,—

“I have ordered the carriage immediately. Your sister is arrived.”

Margaret looked up into his face. His eyes were full of tears. They were alone. She threw her arms round his neck; he pressed her to his heart, and she felt a hot tear fall on her forehead. Not one word was said, but much was understood in that hour.

When Margaret took leave of Lady Donnington and her daughters, her face showed the traces of deep emotion. When she went down stairs to the carriage, Walter and Edmund both hurried to support her, but it was Walter's arm that she took. A new phase in her life was beginning, and it was to him who had walked by her side, and

watched her with loving eyes from the day of her birth, that she was not afraid to show the tears that were streaming down her cheeks, or to betray the agitation of her soul by the tremulous pressure of the arm she held. She got into the carriage, her father and Walter followed her, the door was closed. She exclaimed in surprise,—

“Is not Edmund coming?”

“No,” said Colonel Leslie; “he has just told me that he is going to sleep at Earldon Park—Mr. Warren’s place. We are to send his servant to him there.”

“Does he come back to-morrow?” asked Walter. How grateful Margaret felt to him for that question.

“I don’t know,” was the answer; “he did not say.”

Her heart sank within her, and she bitterly regretted the sudden, and now it seemed to her unaccountable impulse, which had led her to

turn from him and to take Walter's arm. He had appeared anxious to speak to her. He would have probably told her when he should return—she would have had something definite to look to. She almost twisted off the finger of her white glove in her vexation; she would have liked to quarrel with Walter for having offered to take her to the carriage.—“What want of tact to thrust himself forward!” Bad, ungrateful, unjust thought! It was checked at its birth, and Walter's hand was seized, to his great surprise, and pressed between Margaret's, with a sudden emotion which he ascribed to her agitation at the idea of her approaching interview with her sister. Colonel Leslie explained to them, in a few words, that a letter which Mr. Warren had written to him from Dover, announcing their arrival, had been delayed on the road; that in the mean time they had travelled faster than they expected, and that about an hour after they had themselves left

Grantley, the travelling-carriage had arrived there. Mr. and Mrs. Warren had gone on to Earldon, leaving Ginevra in Mrs. Dalton's care, who had instantly dispatched a groom to apprise Colonel Leslie of his daughter's arrival. After this communication the silence remained nearly unbroken as the carriage rolled along. To Margaret the next two hours seemed interminable, and she thought the old coachman had never driven so slowly before. When they passed the lodges of the park, the great stable-clock was striking eleven, and the well-known sounds of the dogs barking, and the hall door opening, had never been so welcome yet to Margaret's ears. She looked for her father as the butler was pulling off her cloak, but he had turned aside and darted into his study, closing the door behind him. She walked straight to the library, but found it dark, and then recollected that she did not know which room her sister was to inhabit; she called the

servant and asked him. He said Mrs. Dalton had not thought it proper to decide till the Colonel's arrival, but he believed that the lady's things had been taken to the chintz bed-room. Margaret ran up the oak stair-case, and found her governess with a flat candlestick in her hand on the landing-place.

"O, where is she?" exclaimed the breathless girl.

"In your father's room, down-stairs, my dear. She was with me just now; but when she heard the Colonel's voice asking for her, she was off like a shot. He was at the bottom of the back-stairs, and she seemed to know her way by instinct. They were in the study, and the door closed, before one had time to turn oneself round."

"I suppose I ought to go down—I wish my father would call me. Tell me quick, Dally!—do you like her?"

“She seems a very nice young lady ; but, dear me, she is so much taller than you ! Who *would* have thought that ? ”

“I must go,” said Margaret, and she went down the stairs that led to her father’s room. She expected to be called ; she thought the door must open soon ; she heard them speaking—she did not feel courage to open the door. She waited—nobody stirred—a low murmur was all that reached her ears ; her heart began to swell, and a sense of pain and irritation to oppress it ; tears came to her eyes, and were with difficulty kept from flowing. The night was intensely cold, and as she stood on the stone floor of that passage, the physical sensation seemed to correspond with the chillness that was creeping over her heart. “I can bear it no longer ! ” she exclaimed, and turned towards the stairs with the intention of shutting herself up in her own room, and giving vent to her feelings ; but as she

mounted the first step, it did occur to her that it was possible that the fault might be on her side—that knowing where her sister was, it might be expected that she would rush to her without waiting to be called—she returned, and after a knock that was not answered, gently opened the door; she saw no one, but by the lights on the carpet perceived that those she had come in search of were in the further room, a sort of inner recess within the study. With a throbbing heart she drew near, but stopped for an instant, overpowered by an unconquerable timidity. Her father—her cold stern father—was standing before a picture, which, since his return, had hung in that place, but had always been covered with a curtain. It was now drawn aside. Supported in his arms, with her head resting on his shoulder, was the daughter of the woman whom he had passionately loved, and whose image was before him. His long suppressed feelings had given



way. It was an hour of uncontrollable emotion. The past and the present seemed to meet in that instant. A torrent of recollections—of sweet and bitter memories—rushed upon him, and in that tongue which had been familiar to him in his days of happiness, but which, for years, had found no utterance—in that Italian language which had been to them for so long but as the music of a dream—he poured forth, in a broken voice, the remembrances of past grief, intermingled with the joyful emotions of the present hour.

“Idol ! Treasure ! Best gift of Heaven !” he exclaimed, as he folded his child to his heart, “Ginevra ! my Ginevra ! Do I breathe again, in human hearing, that name which has never passed my lips for years, but as a cry of anguish. My own, my precious child, call me your father, or say, once—once only, ‘my Henry.’ No, do not say it ; they were *her* last words, and no one, not even you, my angel, must utter them in my hearing.”

A low sweet voice was murmuring in his ear, the child he had held in his arms sank on her knees by his side, her lips moved, her eyes turned from the mute canvas before her, first to Heaven, and then on her father's agitated face. The colour that had deepened in her cheek died away, her head was bent still lower than before, and her tears fell fast on the hand on which her brow was resting.

What was Margaret feeling the while? She was there in the presence of a father, and of a sister, unheeded, unnoticed, unthought of. A strange foreign tongue was in her ears; and the gestures, the tones of impassioned feeling, were as new to her as the language which gave them utterance. She felt with indescribable bitterness that she had no part in their emotion, that neither in the past nor in the present was she anything to her father; her sister appeared to her as a being from another world, who had taken

possession at once of an affection of which she had been unjustly deprived. Had she not also had a mother? In her own little room, had she not often wept in silence as she gazed on her gentle features, and had a father's tenderness ever soothed or consoled *her*? These thoughts hardened her heart. She hurried back through the study, rushed to her own room, closed the door, and gave herself up to the bitterness of her feelings. She would shut her heart against those who cared so little for her; she would not intrude upon them with any troublesome fondness, and may be, she would soon leave home, which would never more be to her the home it used to be. She should probably soon marry Edmund Neville, and go to a new family, to new scenes, and to new friends. Walter must often come and see her: she could never bear to be long separated from dear Old Walter; but as to Grantley—she did not care about Grantley; it was all spoilt to her."

At that moment she drew the curtain and unclosed the shutter, and she was rivetted by the wintry beauty of the scene before her. The moon was shining brightly, the snow-storm was over; but the thick flakes whitened the whole space between the house and the river, which, locked in its icy prison, reflected the lights of the millions of stars that were twinkling in the clear frosty sky. On the leaves of the laurels, and on the more distant beeches, the snow hung in fanciful shapes and graceful outlines, and formed a bed of dazzling whiteness on the ledge of the old-fashioned window where she was standing.

“My home! my English home!” she exclaimed aloud, “what do they care about you—those who make me wish myself away? After all (now an evil spirit at her side espied the favourable moment to suggest a bad thought, which easily took root in the ground which irritation and discontent had prepared)—after all, I do not see why I should

wish myself away, or take my father's indifference so much to heart! I am the eldest sister. Grand-mamma has often told me that I am the heiress of Grantley, and of all that surrounds it. Ginevra is the stranger here, and if I chose to make Grantley uncomfortable to her, I could do it far more easily than she could annoy me."

At that moment, there was a low knock at the door; Margaret started, and in a trembling voice, said—

"Come in."

She had gone through so much during the last few hours, that she was nearly overpowered by her agitation. She felt by an instinctive impression that it was her sister who had come to seek her; a sense of faintness came over her, and as she was crossing the room to meet her she almost fell. In an instant she was caught in Ginevra's arms, who placed her gently on the couch, drew her close to herself, twined her

arms round her own neck, laid her aching head against her breast; and while the eldest sister sobbed as if her heart would break, the youngest soothed her with murmured words of affection, even as if she had been addressing a weeping child.

Margaret felt as if a mother was speaking to her, a strange repose stole over her heart, she wept freely when a soft hand was laid on her forehead, and a gentle earnest kiss was pressed on her burning cheek. The Evil Spirit fled, the icy cord that had bound her heart gave way; she raised her head, smiled through her blinding tears, looked at a face which might have been an angel's, and again hiding her's in that sheltering bosom, murmured—

“ Sister, O sister! are you come at last? Not the one I have expected for a few weeks, but the one I dreamt of years ago.”

Another soft kiss was pressed on her cheek, and Ginevra said—

“Do not talk, now, sister—your hands are cold, your cheek is burning—I know your head is throbbing—My own! I know you are suffering; you must lie down and rest.”

It was true that Margaret felt very unwell; but it was a strange comfort, to cling to her new sister, to yield to her wishes; to suffer her to help her to undress; and then, when she laid her head on her pillow, to look up into her face while she bathed her aching temples. She felt bewildered at the extraordinary reaction of her feelings, at the strangeness of her position. Was that really the sister whom a few moments before she had thought of with such bitterness? But, no, she must be dreaming;—if it was indeed Ginevra, and it was the night of her arrival, ought she not to be waiting upon her, to be nursing her?

“Sister,” she exclaimed, rousing herself for an instant, “you have come a long distance

to-day ; you must be tired. What are you doing here ? ”

“ Resting—dearest—by your side. I should like to stay here all night, watching you sleep.”

“ No, no,” cried Margaret, “ you must not stay. Go, sister, go ; but let me see you to-morrow when I wake. I shall be so afraid of having only dreamed of you. It is so strange ; but I feel as if I had seen your face before. Kiss me again, before you go.”

Ginevra bent over her sister, kissed and blessed her, and then sinking on her knees by the side of the bed, she said, in a low voice—

“ Sister, shall we pray together ? ”

Margaret put her arm round her neck, and drawing her close to herself whispered in her ear—

“ Are there prayers that we *may* say together ? ”

“ The one that God himself made,” answered Ginevra, and her soft low voice repeated the



Lord's Prayer, and as the Amen fell from Margaret's lips a heavy sleep closed her eyes.

Ginevra prayed some time longer by her sister's side; she prayed in silence, and now and then printed a fervent kiss on the hand that was unconsciously detaining her's. A low knock at the door roused her from this position. She gently disengaged her hand, reluctantly yielded her place to Mrs. Dalton, and then retiring to her own room, remained for two hours with her face buried in her hands and absorbed in thought.

## CHAPTER VIII.

At the time of her arrival in England, Colonel Leslie's youngest daughter was about seventeen years old, but she looked older, and was much taller than her sister. Both had small aquiline noses, high foreheads, very much rounded at the temples, dark pencilled eyebrows, and thick eyelashes ; but while Margaret's eyes were of the hue of the violet, or of the hyacinth, those of Ginevra were of the colour of the forget-me-not, or rather of that blue which lies sometimes between the crimson clouds and the burnished gold of a gorgeous sunset, a blue which puts to shame the azure of the rest of the sky. Her hair was fair, and her cheeks were pale ; her mouth was the only feature which was decidedly prettier in her than in her

sister ; it was full of sweetness and gentleness. Her face was calm, but it was the calmness of a smooth sea—still, but not dull—quiet, but expressive. When she came down to breakfast on the morning after her arrival, all eyes were turned with anxious curiosity on the young girl who was a stranger in her father's house, but had come to take there a daughter's place. Her timid step, her likeness to Margaret, the expression of her eyes, at once dissolved all the prejudices that had been conceived against her, and when she turned from her father to Mr. Thornton, he held out both his hands to her, kissed her forehead, and said, " God bless you, my dear girl," in a tone of mingled effort and kindliness. Mrs. Thornton's embrace followed, and then Walter shook hands with her with a cordiality which he had not imagined he should feel, or have been able to show. Colonel Leslie's eyes often wandered from his newspaper that morning ; he did not speak much to Ginevra,

but when she spoke, he listened attentively. As he saw his two daughters sitting together on a low couch in the drawing-room, before a table covered with books and work and flowers, their two pretty heads close together, Ginevra's arm round Margaret's waist, and Margaret's cheek resting on Ginevra's shoulder—as he saw their eyes fondly turning to one another, and their hands often busied at the same piece of tapestry—as he heard the sound of their young voices, and the frequent peals of Margaret's joyous laugh, he drew a deep breath, and the weight of a mountain seemed removed from his breast. That day, and the next, and the next, were spent by the sisters in the enjoyment of a new found happiness, new to both, and apparently welcome to each. There was an extraordinary similarity in their destinies; neither of them had known a mother, a brother, or a sister; and with different characters, different educations, and different previous associations,

both had longed for those ties of kindred which no other affections can replace. It was a pretty sight to see Margaret wrapping a fur cloak round her pale sister, persuading her into the pony chaise, or coaxing her into the sledge, and looking at her side like a damask rose by a lily—it was pretty to see Ginevra weave the green-house flowers, the graceful fuchsias, or the many-coloured heaths, into garlands, which each day she placed on her sister's fair brow—it was pretty to see them read together, to watch them at their Italian lessons, or with their English books before them, correcting each other's mistakes with childish pleasure, and chiding each other in sport—or in the old library when the twilight was closing, the shutters yet open, and the fire burning brightly, to hear Ginevra sing the songs of her own land, while Margaret sat at her feet, and warbled a second, as she caught the melody of those wild strains.

"Sister," the eldest would say, as they sat up at night in each other's rooms, "sister, we must travel very fast over our past lives, and be in a few days like old sisters who have always lived together."

And then she would tell Ginevra how happy she had been as a child, how kind everybody had been to her, how Walter Sydney had always loved her, "and tried to make himself into a mother, a brother,—even a sister," she would say, laughing at the contrast between him and the real sister she had found.

"You have been very happy then, always, dearest?" the other would reply.

"Yes, the happiest child in the world; but I suppose a child's happiness cannot last."

"Have you found that out yet, sister?"

"Guessed it perhaps;" and Margaret bent her head over the flowers which she had just removed from her brow.

“ Have you been happy Ginevra ? ”

“ Sometimes,” was the answer, and then she added quickly,—

“ Tell me more about yourself, my Margaret, my *Reine Marguerite*,” she said, and gazed fondly on the face of her sister, while she drew from her the little histories of her past life, the expression of her sentiments, the statements of her opinions. She listened to her with unwearied interest, she responded with the keenest and most delicate sensibility, she threw a charm over these conversations, and their daily intercourse, which removed all constraint and embarrassment. Margaret was fascinated and subdued by the magic influence of that quiet and most intelligent sympathy ; but at the same time she felt baffled in her efforts to obtain from Ginevra the same unlimited confidence which she involuntarily placed in her ; and after a few days had elapsed, her impression was that she had never met with any

one who understood her so well, or whom she understood so little, as her younger sister. She was so unlike any one she had ever met with before, and all those about her seemed to feel this; even Mrs. Thornton, who generally was surprised at nothing, wondered that she could not dislike Ginevra. She tried to tell her that there was nothing in common between them (not specifying whether she meant the room they were to sit in, or the subjects they were to talk about), and the unaffected interest which Ginevra took in her grand-children, in her poor people, in her garden, forced her to acknowledge the contrary. She told her that English people could esteem foreigners, perhaps love them, but never get identified with them. Ginevra felt no wish to be identified with Mrs. Thornton, but with a sweet smile, said, "she would not claim more than her affection, but would never be satisfied with less." As Mrs. Dalton observed, "she did every-



thing well, great and small, important or insignificant," and Margaret could bear to hear this, and she could bear too to hear her sister reply, when, one day, she had asked her if she felt at her ease with their father—

"O yes; when I am with him, I often think of the beautiful words of scripture, 'Perfect love casteth out fear,' and I think it is so with this purest and holiest of human affections."

"Do you indeed love him thus?" she exclaimed, "then no wonder that he has no affection to spare for me."

The tears sprung to her eyes, but afraid of being misunderstood, she hastily added,—

"Do not mistake me, Ginevra. I once thought I should be jealous of you; but all that gave way at the first sound of your voice, at your first kiss, my own sister, and I shall never," she continued, as Ginevra looked at her with anxious tenderness, "never repine that I am not the

favourite, if you will but love me as I know he loves you."

The days went by, and Margaret wondered how she could have lived without Ginevra, so necessary did she now appear to her happiness. She was not, however, completely satisfied that she *made her out*, as Frederick Vincent would have said. There was an evident reluctance to enter into conversation on subjects personal to herself, that sometimes puzzled and almost provoked Margaret.

"Can you persuade yourself," she one day said to Walter, "that Ginevra is only seventeen?"

"Why she looks very young, does she not?"

"Yes; but she is so wise, so wonderfully wise! I wonder if it is all real. She is like somebody in a book; and yet I should as soon think my Italian greyhound affected, as my new sister. Such strange thoughts come into my head, Walter, while she is talking to me. Sometimes I

think of the scripture text, about entertaining angels unawares ; and then again she puts me in mind of that beautiful stanza of Coleridge,

“ Her slender palms together prest,  
Heaving sometimes on her breast ;  
Her face resigned to bliss or bale—  
Her face ! O call it fair, not pale—  
And both blue eyes, more bright than clear,  
And each about to have a tear.”

Margaret had read this passage out loud, and as she put down the book these two lines caught her eye—

“ He who had seen this Geraldine,  
Had thought her, sure, a thing divine.”

“What an extraordinary poem this *Christabel* is,” she exclaimed—“like a bad dream !” Her head rested on her hand, and with the astonishing rapidity of thought, her mind reverted almost at the same instant to Maud Vincent’s mysterious hints and advice to herself. “What could she mean by ‘opening my eyes?’—and why did Lucy seem so vexed at her saying so? Lucy is the best

of the two, though not the cleverest; but Maud is the most affectionate,—at least the fondest of me. She used to wish me to marry her brother; perhaps Lucy wants him to marry Ginevra, and Maud meant that all the time.” And then, the next link in the chain of thought brought her to wonder (not for the first time) that several days had elapsed, and that Edmund Neville had not re-appeared, or, as far as she knew, written to announce his return. She felt some curiosity about his relations the Warrens, but neither her questions, nor Mrs. Dalton’s investigations, drew from Ginevra more than the assurance that they had been very kind to her; whether she liked them, whether she wished to see them again, what sort of people they were, and many other similar inquiries met with nothing but evasive and unsatisfactory answers. The interest she felt about her sister, and the amusement she found in her society moderated for a while Margaret’s uneasi-

ness at Edmund's protracted absence, and still more extraordinary silence; but at the end of a week she grew painfully alive to it, and watched for the hour of the post, the casual arrival of a note, the ringing of the house-door bell, and the sound of wheels or horses' feet in the avenue, with a keen anxiety, which was very evident to Walter, and did not wholly escape the observation of others.

One morning as she was coming out of her room, she saw Ginevra at the end of the gallery on which her own opened, with a letter in her hand. She was reading it attentively, with one knee resting on the edge of the window seat. She seemed very much absorbed with its contents, and there was a speck of colour in her pale cheeks. Margaret walked up to her and put her hand on her shoulder. She gave a violent start, and turned quite pale, and when her sister said, with a smile, "I am afraid

I have startled you very much," the colour rushed back into her face, and she trembled visibly.

"I hope you have had no bad news from Italy," said Margaret, while Ginevra hastily folded the letter in her hand and thrust it in the folds of her dress.

"O, no;" said Ginevra, mournfully. "I have no news to get from Italy: my only remaining friends left Verona some months ago, and since my uncle Leonardo's death, and Father Francesco's departure for America, the links that bound me to my native land have been severed one by one, and Italy"—she continued, with a voice of more emotion than she had ever yet betrayed, "and Italy is nothing to me now, but a tale that is told—a dream that has been dreamt—a prelude to the life that is now beginning."

"A happy life, I trust," said Margaret.

"Thank you, sister, thank you," answered

Ginevra, in a voice, that without any apparent reason to herself, affected Margaret; her manner was at once tender and abrupt, and she left her suddenly.

That day, at breakfast, Colonel Leslie told his daughters that he had written to Mr. Warren to propose to him and his wife that they should come to Grantley for a few days, and that he had just received a letter announcing that they would arrive the next day. Ginevra gave no signs of interest at this intelligence; but Margaret looked earnestly at her father, with the expectation that some communication about Edmund would follow. She was not disappointed. "Neville," he said, after a pause, "has also written to say that he will return here to-morrow. He has been delayed, day after day, at Earlsdon, by some matters of business." Walter looked up from the "Times" at that moment, and saw the flush of joy in Margaret's eyes,—sudden, bright, and dazzling, it

played on her face, and seemed to vibrate through her frame.

Walter had suffered much from his childhood upward, in the midst of what, to all appearance, would have been deemed a calm and prosperous life. With many sources of enjoyment in his pursuits, and in his tastes, he had seldom met with sympathy in others, and there had been in his breast a store of ardent and passionate feelings which had never found full scope. He had learnt that lesson which either softens or hardens a man's heart—that in his strongest affections he must not expect a return, that his life must be one continual self-sacrifice, and his own happiness consist in the happiness of others—he had early learnt this lesson, and well did he take it to heart; long and steadily did he practise it. To guard Margaret Leslie from the least touch of evil, and, if possible, of sorrow—to watch that the breath of heaven played not too roughly on her



check, or not a stone lay in her path that he could remove—had been the aim and the joy of his existence. He often forced himself in calm self-discipline to scan his feelings, to interrogate the past, and anticipate the future. He thought of her marriage, he pictured her to himself in the enjoyment of domestic happiness—in the performance of domestic duties—and he could breathe an ardent prayer that he might thus see her, and never wish to be more than her friend unless, years hence, her affections should be blighted, her heart chilled, or her spirit broken. Then would be his time; then—then—he would bind up these wounds, and pour into them the balm of a love that had known no change, and warm what the cold breath of the world had chilled at the undying flame kindled in silence and nurtured in self-devotion; he had no fear that five or ten or twenty years could dim its brightness or subdue its ardour. There was one question that Walter

often asked himself in his stern self-examinations—why was it that, if indeed he had no hope for himself, and no care but for her happiness?—why, when she sat by Neville, and looked into his face as if the destiny of her life was written in his glance, and she lived only in the sunshine of his presence?—why did he, so resigned and self-forgetting, long to tear her away from him, to thrust him aside, and to clasp her to his own heart, as a bird rescued from the snare of the fowler. He fought with himself—he struggled in silence—he forced himself, in imagination, to place her hand in Neville's, to think of her as Neville's wife; but an imperious, overpowering, inward voice seemed to forbid him, even in thought, to sanction this marriage; and, in Old Walter's heart, there were conflicts sustained which were little dreamt of by those who saw him engaged with his architectural designs, or his benevolent schemes, or, as at the moment we

are speaking of, with the leading article of the "Times" newspaper.

During the whole of that day, and of the next, Margaret was in a state of great excitement ; she had not before spoken to her sister about Edmund Neville, but now she not only mentioned him once while making some arrangements about the rooms their guests were to occupy, but she often reverted to the subject, and Ginevra listened with patient interest. Once when Margaret had requested her to take into Mrs. Warren's room a nosegay which they had been making up together, she followed her upstairs, and not finding her in the room which she had pointed out, she opened the door of the next, which was the one that Edmund had occupied all the time he had been at Grantley. Ginevra was standing by the writing-table and examining the blotting-paper book. She was turning over the pages with a look of interest, and holding it upside down, she carried it to the light,

and seemed employed in making out some indistinct traces of writing. Margaret felt an annoyance, greater than she quite understood, at seeing her thus employed. With that feeling of reserve and delicacy which by nature and by education she was particularly alive to, earnestly as she would have wished to visit that room after Edmund's departure, and to detect and find pleasure in the most trifling traces of his presence, she had never ventured beyond the door, or even supposed it possible to gratify such a wish. Ginevra put down the book, and moving towards the chimney, stood a moment gazing at the fire, and then walking away and meeting Margaret at the door, started and coloured, when she said to her, "You have put the flowers in the wrong place." Ginevra turned back in silence, took up the vase of flowers, and followed Margaret to the south bed-room.

As the latter turned round to speak to her

sister, she was struck by the expression of her countenance. It was, as usual, very still, but painfully anxious; and, as they both laid hold at the same time of a geranium blossom that had escaped from the vase, Margaret almost started at the cold, damp, nervous touch of her sister's hand. She longed to ask her if she was well, but it was difficult to speak to Ginevra of herself. Easy to get on with, as she generally was, and alive, even to a singular degree, to the cares and interests of others, she shrunk, not ungraciously, but with the manner of a sensitive plant when handled, from any inquiry about her own health or her own feelings.

As Margaret entered the drawing-room that evening, she found her grandmother already seated in her arm-chair; and Mr. and Mrs. Warren, who had only arrived just in time to dress, came down a few minutes afterwards. She was a plain insignificant looking woman, with a soft voice, and

a common-place manner ; a long residence abroad had given both to her and to her husband a distaste to their own country, without attaching them to any other. He was, on the whole, a kind and good-natured man, but had fallen into the grievous error of supposing that to be fastidious was a proof of refinement, and to be impertinent a mark of distinction. He had thrown himself into an arm-chair, and bowed coldly to Mr. Thornton and to Walter when Colonel Leslie introduced them to him, and seemed to doubt, for a while, if he should treat Margaret with supercilious indifference, or with condescending familiarity. Her beauty probably decided the question; and as he took her in to dinner, he said to her, as if he had known her for years,

“ Don’t you quite adore your sister ? ” and then, scarcely waiting for an answer, addressed Ginevra in Italian across the table.

There was a vacant place by Margaret, and

a few minutes after dinner was begun, Edmund Neville glided into the room, and took possession of it. It seemed to her an age since they had met, and she could scarcely disguise the sudden increase of spirits which his arrival occasioned. He too seemed very happy, and began talking and laughing with greater animation than usual. He begged Mrs. Warren to tell Mrs. Thornton everything about the cold-water system, in the happy conviction, as he whispered to Margaret, that her grandmother would soon wrap all the cottagers in wet blankets; and he at the same time suggested to Mr. Thornton to secure Mr. Warren's interest for the new turnpike on the North Road. When these topics were set afloat, and the sound of voices enabled him to speak unheard, he whispered to Margaret,

“ Ask your sister a question; for I want her to look this way.”

“ Nonsense! she is talking to Walter, and I

will not disturb them. I wish them to be great friends."

" Really ! do you think they will suit ? "

" O yes, I am sure of it ; but he is so shy, and she is so reserved, that they have not made much acquaintance yet."

" She is reserved, is she ? "

" Yes, in some ways she is. There is no making her talk of herself."

" That is not a common fault," said Edmund, with a smile.

" Is she not beautiful, Mr. Neville ? "

" How can I tell, if you will not make her look this way ? "

" You must have patience till after dinner, and then I shall introduce you to her."

" O no, thank you, I hate a formal introduction. You will see that I shall contrive to introduce myself. How have your grandfather and grandmother received her ? "



“ O, as kindly as possible—particularly grand-papa; and yet, he had a great deal to get over. He could not endure that papa should marry a Catholic and a foreigner.”

“ Prejudices are stubborn things, no doubt,” replied Edmund, “ but affections are stronger; and when they clash, the first go to the wall—How do Walter’s stand? ”

“ They are quite of a different sort from grand-papa’s; but, I believe, he fancied he should not like Ginevra, and—”

“ I think he likes her very much, now; don’t you? Look how they are talking. Can you hear what it is all about? ”

“ Cathedrals, I believe. Tell me how did you like the Vincents, yesterday? ”

“ Which of them? ”

“ Maud.”

“ About as much, I suppose, as you liked her brother.”

“ I like him very much.”

“ Exactly : I thought so ; well, I liked her very much. She is a sort of person who would toil to gain her end, and never rest till she had gained it ; and I honour such people.”

“ Why, that should depend on what their aim is.”

“ Not entirely. There is something great in fixity of purpose, in a strong will and a dogged perseverance, even when there is nothing good or great in the object aimed at.”

“ Such a *will* as that might make a man more criminal than great,” answered Margaret, with some animation. “ There is nothing admirable in mere strength of purpose, when it is the result of pride and the instrument of tyranny.”

“ Moral strength may be the result of pride, but not the occasion of crime—not of debasing, mean crime, at least.”

“ O, Mr. Neville!” exclaimed Margaret ; “ is not

everything that is wrong, more or less vile?—is not guilt always selfish, and selfishness always mean?”

“I do not call that a mean selfishness, which makes a man trace out for himself a destiny, and be true to it and to himself, even though he may have to sacrifice others in his efforts to reach his end. There is something that belongs to a high order of character in the determination to conquer obstacles, and sweep away whatever lies between us and our object. Depend upon it, Miss Leslie, a scrupulous nature is never joined to true greatness; a man who weighs every word before he utters it, will never be eloquent, and he who debates upon every action before he performs it, will never be great. There is a moral instinct that carries a man through life far better than what are generally called principles.”

“How different your ideas are from Walter’s! He, too, admires strength of will, and steadiness of purpose, but he says that the will of man is

a fearful power for good or for evil, and, if not rightly directed, may start aside like a broken bow, and destroy himself and others."

At the mention of Walter's name, Edmund had rapidly glanced at the side of the table where he sat, and it was some moments before Margaret obtained his attention, and the conversation was resumed.

"Do you think," he asked her after a pause, "that one person can long withstand the *will* of another, when there exists that fixity of purpose which we were speaking of just now, in one of the parties engaged in a trial of strength? Don't you suppose that intense volition, even if it stops at any guilty means of success, must triumph in the end over passive resistance?"

"I do not understand you."

"Suppose, for instance, that the happiness of my whole life depended on conquering the will of those I had to deal with—in obliging them to

act according to my ideas, and not according to their own—do you not think that, granting equality of mental power, my indomitable will must conquer in the end?”

“Walter would say that it depended on the justice of your cause, and, failing that, on the nature of the resistance you met with.”

A dark shade passed over Neville's face, and he said abruptly,

“For heaven's sake tell me what *you* think, and not what *Walter says*.”

“I think as he does; but I am not as good as he is, and that is why I quote him. I hate talking as if I was better than I am: it is like hypocrisy, though not so really. Living with a person of very high principles and of exalted goodness, is apt to make one good in theory; we fancy ourselves like them, till something proves to us that we are only *electrotyped*,” she said, pointing with

a smile to a piece of plate of that description which stood before them.

“ You are right,” answered Neville ; and there was another pause. “ Miss Leslie, if somebody you cared very much about, whom you loved with all your heart, was to thwart you on the point nearest to your heart, would it alter your feelings ? ”

With a trembling voice she answered,

“ If I loved any one with all my heart, I should have no heart to set on anything else.”

The usual bright glance of her eyes was changed to one of timid and diffident anxiety as she looked at Edmund’s thoughtful face. He seemed more absorbed in his subject than in her, and went on—

“ Your devotion, then, to the person you loved would be such as to conquer all obstacles ? ”

“ Always supposing that nothing wrong was required of me.”

“ Oh, of course,” rejoined Edmund impatiently. “ Let us always suppose that, and not make conventional speeches.”

“ I have never yet been accused of making such,” returned Margaret with a mixture of gaiety and annoyance. She, who of all human beings had hitherto been the most fearless, to a degree that would have amounted to boldness had she been less feminine in appearance and in reality, was beginning to feel the tyrannical power of a strong affection, conscious of its own existence, and uncertain of requital ; the rising and sinking of her spirits, the colour of her cheek, and the quicker or slower pulsation of her heart, turned upon the gay or the troubled glance of Neville’s flashing eyes and the curved lines about his most expressive mouth. Her last words had evidently displeased him, and he maintained a gloomy silence, till the moment that the ladies left the dining-room.

“What do you think of my nephew?” asked Mrs. Warren of Ginevra, as they all stood before the library fire. “I did not imagine that we should meet him at your father’s house.”

“You thought he was in Ireland,” answered Ginevra, who was attentively examining a group of Dresden China figures.

“He is a great favourite with us all,” observed Mrs. Thornton; “quite a tame cat in this house, or an *enfant de la maison*, as foreigners say. I beg your pardon, my love, for talking of foreigners before you ——”

“It is because you do not consider me quite as a foreigner, I hope,” interrupted Ginevra, gaily. Mrs. Warren laughed, and said,

“You must dress a little differently from what you do now, if you wish to be taken for an Englishwoman.”

This was true; for the excessive simplicity of Ginevra’s dress was as unlike as possible to what



would have been worn by any person accustomed even to the most domestic country life in England. She was in mourning, and her black gown with its long waist, its hanging and picturesque open sleeves, the plain velvet ribbon round her neck, and her hair braided in innumerable tresses, but without a single ornament, made her look very like an old picture, and very unlike an English girl of seventeen. She blushed slightly and said,

“ Margaret will teach me.”

“ Why, Colonel Leslie was so enthusiastic about *your* dress at dinner, that he will perhaps persuade Miss Leslie to imitate you.”

“ And why should Margaret imitate any one ? ” Mrs. Thornton began, in a tone that alarmed Margaret ; for, to be the object of her grandmother’s comments was her particular horror, and she dexterously turned the subject of conversation by holding out to admiration the old lace scarf which Mrs. Warren wore.

When the doors of the dining-room opened, the two sisters were sitting together on a low couch, employed in winding some worsted. The skeins of crimson wool were thrown across Margaret's extended hands, and Ginevra was holding in hers the ever-increasing red ball. At that moment it escaped her grasp, and rolled half-way across the room. Neville, near whom it fell, picked it up, and brought it to Margaret. She said, with a smile,

“Give it to Ginevra.”

He remained a minute standing before her, and with a half-smile on his countenance. She blushed, and held out her hand for the ball. He detained it a moment, till she had lifted up her eyes to his; he then smiled outright, released it with a very civil bow, and then, sitting down on the other side of Margaret, whispered,

“Now, I think, I have introduced myself.”

He seemed to have quite recovered his spirits

and his good humour, and was more agreeable than ever that evening: it was perhaps one of the happiest that Margaret had ever spent; Edmund seemed so fond of her, and so rejoiced at finding himself once more at Grantley; there was even something gentler and more affectionate in his manner than had ever been the case before. Once, when she had been speaking to him of her happiness in having found a sister, and *such* a sister! and had exclaimed, in her enthusiasm, "Does she not seem more like a creature from some other world than one belonging to ours?" he seized her hand, as he once had done before, and murmured in a low voice, "You are an angel of goodness and of tenderness." The full tide of joy rushed upon her in that instant, and made her heart beat with tumultuous emotion. It was also a pleasure to her that Edmund should appear to advantage in Ginevra's eyes. She had begun to look up to her, and to

feel a conviction of her great mental superiority, which made her anxious that she should appreciate and admire him. She was almost provoked at her not taking more part in the conversation that evening. Once or twice she was unusually animated, but at other times appeared thoughtful and abstracted. When Mr. and Mrs. Warren and Walter joined them, the conversation became general.

“How do you like the appearance of our charming country?” Mr. Warren asked of Ginevra.

“Very much,” she replied; “but its look of business and activity almost frightens me. What becomes of idle people in England? Do you kill them like the drones of the hive?”

“In England,” said Walter, “idleness is treated as a crime in the poor, and is punishable by law; in the rich the law takes no cognizance of it.”

“But it often brings its own punishment with it,” interrupted Margaret. “The rich are often

bored to death with their own idleness, and so come to be considered and treated as bores by others. A day of real idle ennui is more fatiguing than one of hard labour; and to be thought a bore is worse than to be thought wicked—”

Walter frowned, but she persisted.

“ You know very well, that being thought wicked does not make one wicked; whereas, to be thought a bore, is, in fact, to be one; so the first does not signify, and the other does.”

Mr. Warren and Edmund laughed, and Ginevra shook her head.

“ Do you not miss the Italian sun dreadfully?” said Mrs. Warren, in a drawling tone.

— “ O no,” answered Ginevra, “ not yet, and not here. There is a sunshine in this house (she glanced fondly at Margaret) that makes even a dull sky turn bright, — and a heavy heart feel light,” she added, in so low a tone that none heard those concluding words, or detected the sigh that accompanied them.

"I am afraid your sunshine will be like beet-root sugar, Signora mia," observed Mr. Warren, who had not understood her allusion, "and only satisfy those who have not known the genuine article, as the phrase goes. I only wish I had never been in Italy. It spoils one for life."

"Do you mean that it has spoiled you or your life?" asked Edmund.

"My friends must judge of the first point, and I of the second. O for a day of Italian warmth and gaiety!" he exclaimed, with an expressive shrug and groan. "You, Edmund, who have never been beyond the Alps, and only dawdled among those horrid Swiss chalets and glaciers, can have no sympathy with my yearnings for the 'land of the south, the clime of the sun.'"

"Does the Italian sunshine," said Edmund, "still form *improvisatores* Is that gift of inspiration still to be found among the Italians?"

“*A qui le demandez vous,*” cried Mrs. Warren ;  
“the Signora Ginevra is an *improvisatrice de la première force*, and when the spirit of poetry moves her, she can pour out her thoughts in verses which will stand the test of criticism.”

“Is it possible !” exclaimed Margaret. “O dear Ginevra, let us hear you now—to-night ; it would give us such pleasure.”

Ginevra gently refused, and Edmund whispered to Margaret, “Tell your father to ask her.”

She eagerly appealed to Colonel Leslie, who looked at his youngest daughter, and said aloud, “She will, if she can.”

In an instant she rose and went to the piano-forte, played a few chords in a hurried manner, and fixed her clear bright eyes on her father ; one of her hands was raised to her brow, and with the other she continued a low modulation on the keys. All eyes were fixed upon her.

Mr. Warren said, "You must give her a subject." There was a general silence ; at last Walter said, "I will propose one—Hope or Fear."

"Hope *and* Fear," said Margaret.

In a moment the colour rose deeply in Ginevra's cheek, and the light in her eyes seemed to shine with dazzling brilliancy. The moment of inspiration was come. Her glance wandered from her father's face, and appeared to rest on Neville's. His was fixed on her with earnest expectation. She spoke not, the colour faded from her cheek, and the hand that had been raised to her brow fell slowly on the keys. In a moment she began playing, and the low uncertain hurried tones which she drew from the instrument, seemed to express the vague instinctive approaches of a dawning apprehension. The melody changed into wild notes that oppressed the soul like the spell of an increasing terror ; they rendered, with a mysterious power, the acuteness of agony ; and



then, as the sound of rain on the parched ground, or as the small cloud in the sky when the earth is famishing, a few faint notes, the returning whispers of hope in the soul, rose and fell in strange alternations, now swelling like the breeze on the sea, now dying away like the expiring murmurs of a distant storm, till at last one sudden, triumphant, exulting burst of melody resounded in the ears, and re-echoed in the hearts of the listeners. Again and again rang that victorious peal, with so clear, so thrilling, so transporting an accent, that Walter, covering his face with his hands, could only find vent for his emotion by uttering those words which express the last and sublimest triumph of hope over fear—"O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?"

The last notes of that glorious harmony had died away, but seemed still to float in the silent air, and no one spoke or moved, so deep was the

impression produced, till Ginevra herself rose, and walked away from the pianoforte. Margaret kissed her without speaking ; Mr. Warren called her St. Cecilia ; Mrs. Thornton began telling Mrs. Warren, in a low voice, what a wonderful talent for music Margaret had, but that for her part she had never wished her to be a Muse, or an Improvisatrice, or a St. Cecilia, or anything of that kind.

“ Why did you not speak as well as play ? ” asked Mr. Warren, after a pause.

“ I did what I *could*, ” she answered, with a glance at her father.

Edmund Neville, who had been sitting opposite the pianoforte, and had not moved since she had begun playing, suddenly crossed the room and sat down by her. They spoke together for a few minutes in a low voice. Margaret thought he was praising her talent, and wished she could play like her, or praise like him ; for there was an

expression in his eyes that she had never seen before, and which she ascribed to the magic power of genius. And could she wonder that he felt its influence, when there was not a nerve in her own frame that was not thrilling with admiration and excitement under the resistless spell of that bewitching harmony?—and could she wonder that her sister listened with a look of agitated and intense interest to the eloquent words whose power and whose charm she knew but too well? She did not wonder, but perhaps she trembled. Perhaps a vague apprehension crossed her mind in that moment, faint as the first notes of Ginevra's melody; but it was soon swallowed up in the happiness of the next hour, for Edmund came and told her that he had finally resolved on furnishing and inhabiting Darrell Court, an old house in the neighbourhood, which had belonged to his family for many hundred years, and which his father had given up to him. He made her

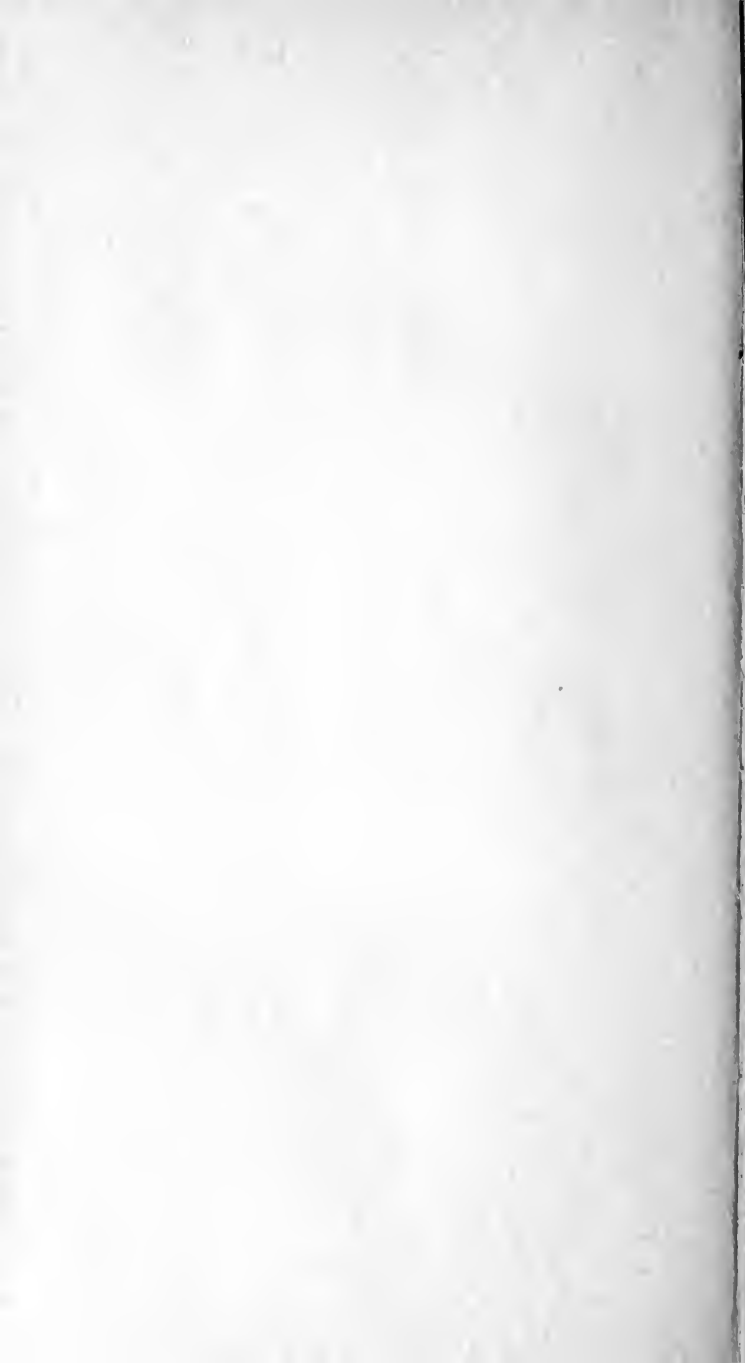
promise to drive over and see it on the first fine day; he consulted her on various points connected with his projects, and asked her advice, and praised her taste, and sketched designs, and described balustrades, till the cloud that had for an instant hung over the brightness of that happy evening passed away from her heart and from her brow, like a light vapour from a sunny sky.

END OF VOL. I.

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